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Narrative Lyrics

by

Edward Lucas White

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Narrative Lyrics

By

Edward Lucas White

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
New York and London
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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
TO
HIM WHO APPROVED

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
LUCIFER	1
RHAMPSINITOS	8
TALITH	21
EGLON AND EHUD	26
SHAMGAR	36
THE LEVITE	46
BENAIAH	49
DEIOCES	52
THE TITAN	55
THE LAST BOWSTRINGS	63
KRANAË	68
THE RETRIBUTION	78
VERTUMNA	86
THE MEASURE OF THE SWORD	95
DONE FOR	113

PAGE

MARCABRUN 120

CERTAINTY 124

THE EMPEROR 126

THE GHOULA 129

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NARRATIVE LYRICS

LUCIFER.

THERE is a tale that, when, around the throne
Of Allah in vast circles blazed and shone
The shields of rebel angels, Almahar,
The friend of Lucifer, had flown afar
Upon a mission to some shadowy clime
Beyond the reach of the resounding chime
Of the strong chorus of the choiring spheres;
Where not one spirit in the silence hears
Even the whirr of the lone star that swings
On the dim border of their circling rings;
Where all things are not found to know or tell
Like anything in earth or heaven or hell.

While he upon his errand passed the bound
Of the pale confines where all light and sound
Fade into that which is not day nor night,
Where is no ghost of darkness or of light,
His friend, on fire with immortal pride,
Because the ether where his pinions plied
Was the same ether which all angels breathed;
Because the light wherewith his brows were wreathed

As each archangel's halo of them all
Shone, and not brighter; since the rise and fall
Of his strong purple wings diffused and shed
Such perfume as all angel plumage fed,
No other and no sweeter; since the tones
Of his gold voice, such as each angel owns,
Not stronger and not clearer, like a sword
Clove heaven through with praises of the Lord;
Because he was not any other thing
Than what he was, rose up against the King,
Hating the very heaven that he trod
Because he was an angel and not God.

After the lightnings of the Lord had burned
Their pride, and all their strength to fear was turned,
Above their heads, now haloless and bowed,
The sentence hurtled, harsh as fire and loud:
Into the kingdom of the nether world,
Where Eblis rules, the rebels should be hurled,
Cast out of heaven forever, now no more
Angels, but demons among demons, soar
They might not in the day, but in the dark
In vain should strive, in vain should gaze and hark
Unto the silence, and each one alone
With his own memories might laugh or moan,
But never sing and never smile again,
And ever seek new memories in vain,
For no new thought might ease or change the smart
Where the old thoughts ate into each one's heart.

When Almahar, his errand ended, came
From Allah's presence, clothed with velvet flame

His flight had kindled, missing Lucifer
And all at once aware of a vague stir
Deep in averted eyes, he asked at length,
And Raphael, shuddering through all his strength,
Answering his longing for his absent friend,
Told him all things whatever to the end.
The angel, with bowed face and loosened hair,
Fled out of heaven, wandering anywhere
Among the wildernesses of the stars
Beyond the radiance of heaven's bars,
Bewailing his lost friend. Between his hands
The hot tears fell, like pearls or golden sands,
And from his head his pale straight tresses streamed,
And to a thousand worlds their shining seemed
A portent of some woe unspeakable
Lit from fires of a colder hell.
And when he took his place among the choir
Again, his face was changed as though by fire,
And paler than is any restless ghost
He sang, the saddest of the heavenly host.

After a thousand ages, Almahar
Passed through a region where there is one star
Whose baleful light makes deaf the eyes and stuns,
And a vast meadow, all aflower with suns,
Is under it where it hangs in the dark.
And there he paused and seemed to muse and hark,
Pondering the loveliness beneath his feet,
And when he raised his eyes, it was to greet
The gaze of his lost friend who sat enthroned
Upon the dark star where it swung and groaned.

The silence boomed and thundered in their ears,
And, their eyes brimming with eternal tears,
Each felt his life flow backward at full tide,
And speechlessness seemed with them to abide.
Almahar broke the stillness, and his speech
Was a hoarse whisper as though, out of reach,
Beyond some gray horizon, moaned and roared
The billows of an ocean grim, unshored,
Salt with the bitternesses of the tears
Of myriad nations shed through countless years.
And the strained voice, charged with a multitude
Of sympathies and yearnings unsubdued,
Spoke much, and the words little, and he said,
"You suffer, Lucifer." The other's head
Quivered erect on his tense neck, his eyes
Blazed with uncounted molten memories,
His answer was a chill and bristling hiss
Filling the hard unlovable abyss
With writhing sighs: "Would I could make you feel
The agonies, more sharp than fire or steel,
That eat my heart out," Lucifer replied.
"And yet there is no other one beside
So fierce and fell as this, I cannot gain
The power to make you share my rage and pain.
No effort or device my thought conjures
Can give my soul the power to hurt yours
As I would hurt you had I but the power
To fuse eternity into one hour,
To mix in it the misery that dwells
In all the caverns of the farthest hells
And set this wave of deathless fire to roll
Forth in a torrent and engulf your soul

And smother it forever!" When amaze
And questionings lit up the other's gaze,
He burst out once again: "Can you not see
What tortures, and has always tortured me?
The universe cries out with one accord,
'He fell because his heart could brook no lord.'
And what would it avail to me that I
Should face them all and give their throats the lie?
It may be true—all beings know this smart—
Not even Satan can read Satan's heart.
To you I swear I did and could obey
As all the angels, easily as they.
But heaven was unto me a vaster hell—
To know forever, and to know too well,
That all the hierarchies of the blest
Looked up to me as purest, noblest, best,
As perfect in all thoughts and in each deed,
Sterling at heart and certain to succeed,
While I could see, along with no surprise,
My valuation writ in Allah's eyes.
You I had loved, you loved me well of old,
But how could any love or friendship hold,
When I beheld grow and increase in you,
Who knew my life and mind and heart all through,
The like perception of my real unworth?
I saw it, and that was my hatred's birth.
Torture enough it was to me that I
Saw every angel halt to let me by,
And knew myself unworthy all the while;
Worse, what I saw well hid in Allah's smile,
And worst that you, my confidant and friend,
Should know me as I was, and still pretend

To have for me your old unreined esteem;
Could read me and be willing yet to seem
Full of your old bright gladness in my sight;
Appear to give me what had been my right—
And was no more; conserve the fair outside
Which you had showed me trusted and untried,
And which you knew I never did deserve.
And well I knew no speech of mine would serve,
If I had spoken. Still your loyalty
Would say that you had seen no change in me,
That you loved me as truly as of old,
And knew my tinselled dross for very gold.
I knew your fancies you almost believed,
And by your hopes of me were half deceived.
And to my pride this was the keenest smart,
That sympathy for me was in your heart,
A longing that I might be as I seemed,
And the black insult that you ever dreamed
I might become so through your help and love;
This was my crowning wrong, all else above,
That you were able to admit at all
Compassion for my weakness and my fall.
Help—which I would not brook from the Most High—
From you! presuming on our friendship's tie!
Since Allah knew, why should he still forbear?
He felt compassion too! I was his care!
'T was then I turned my force of mind and limb
To make impossible for you or him
Aid or compassion. Truly I might be
Damned, but I still should stand self-poised and free,
No ward for help or satellite for gain,
But mine own sovereign, bearing mine own pain.

Him I have thwarted. Sympathy nor ruth
Can ever touch his chill and righteous truth.
But you are gentle still. Now do you know
Why hatred of you still in me must grow?
Hate I can face, and feel my pulses thrill
With hate no hate can master or can kill,
But yet I feel one hate all hates above
At the unmanning knowledge of your love,
And twenty-fold I hate you that you dare
Still to insult with pity my despair."
He ceased, and hatred filled his eyes and ears
To realize the angel's gaze and tears.
And Almahar in gentleness replied:
"In very deed my love has never died,
And it will live forever as it ought,
The more because I find you, whom I thought
A demon among demons since your fall,
Are still a fallen angel, after all."

RHAMPSINITOS.

μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἔλεγον τοῦτον τὸν βασιλέα ζωὸν καταβῆναι ἐς τὸν οἱ Ἕλληνες ἀίδην νομίζουσι εἶναι, κακεῖθι συγκυβεύειν τῇ Δήμητρι, καὶ τὰ μὲν νικᾶν αὐτὴν τὰ δὲ ἐσσοῦσθαι ὑπ᾽ αὐτῆς, καί μιν πάλιν ἄνω ἀπικέσθαι δῶρον ἔχοντα παρ᾽ αὐτῆς χειρόμακτρον χρύσεον

HERODOTUS, ii., 122.

I

AFTER dark the chariot was harnessed,
And the King came through a hidden postern,
Mounted in the boskage of his gardens,
And in silence through a distant gateway,
Void of ornament and giving egress
Into a walled lane, the car was driven.
Slowly through the city, choosing byways,
The four horses plodded; when the houses
All were left behind, the lash laid on them
Hurled them like winged eagles toward the desert.
Through the low haze the uneasy moonlight
Fell obliquely on a speeding shadow
Tipped with silver manes, a soundless flurry
Of gilt hoofs, white spokes, and whirring tires
With a surf of brown-red sand about it
In cascades of dust, and all behind it
Were unrolled two narrow, inky furrows,

As the shadow skimmed the sun-baked surface
Toward the caverned rock-hill-range of Ammon.
There one shape with crowned and crested helmet
Vanished in a cleft of rock. Outside it
Three remained, one helmeted and crested,
Two bareheaded, by the steaming horses.

II

And when the grooms had loosed the sweating team
And picketed them safely by the rocks,
In the deep shadow, and had given each
An armful of the fodder they had brought;
And, when they cooled, had poured for each a drink
Of water from the goat-skin water-bag
Into the leathern bucket; while the beasts
Crunched on contentedly, they greased the hubs,
So they would run for certain without creaking;
They wiped the harness dry and hung it up
Along the railing of the tilted car.
And then the grooms stood, drank again and puffed,
And mopped their faces well, and drank once more.
And the tall officer of the King's guards,
He who had driven, took his helmet off
And wiped his lordly forehead, staring out
Over the desert at the sinking moon.
And then the three sat down upon their cloaks
And leaned against the rocks and drank more wine.
And the grooms wondered if that off-wheel spoke
Was sprung as badly as it looked to be;
Discussed the left-hand trace-horse's sore mouth;
Wished he had a new cover on his bit,

And said the old skin-cover was too hard—
It chafed his mouth, they 'd told the head-groom so.
And as the other was not mellowed yet
With drinking, but had grown more dignified,
As the first three drinks usually made him,
He only listened to them, broad awake.

III

Rhampsinitos, through the silent cavern,
Followed fast a guide whose treads were noiseless,
And whose eyes gave out the only torch-rays
That lit up the monarch's ringing footsteps.
And the guide went first. His face was hidden
From the mortal following behind him,
Yet if he had seen it every moment
He would not have dreaded the eye-sockets,
Empty and aflame and phosphorescent,
For his courage was a kingly courage.
And the pathway, sharply sloping downwards,
Led him finally unto a portal
Carved with carvings beautiful and sombre.
And his guide there turned aside and vanished.
After a brief space of utter darkness,
The doors opened with a hingeless silence.
Rhampsinitos entered a thick-columned
Lintelled hall, so vast the roof was hidden,
Not by darkness, but by very distance,
For, although the myriads of braziers,
Shed a light lead-colored, slow, and heavy,
Nothing in the place was clothed in shadow.
The King strode between the throngs of pillars;

Paced the hall's length on the middle pavement;
Paused at the first step before the throne-place;
Stood and gazed upon the Queen who sat there;
Saw her eyes, the eyes of great Demeter,
The still eyes of the pale Queen of Hades,
She who rules all men's hearts forever
After they are dead and have forgotten
All the queens of love and earthly hours,
And remember her alone and love her,
With a dead love that is most undying,
As all lovers, fevered and exhausted,
Love the death which makes them calm for always.
And the King, who was a living lover,
Knew that he would love her dead, and trembled.
And he trembled while her eyes were on him.
Then the Queen's great voice said: "Rhampsinitos,
Since you are a mortal, not my lover,
Since you come alive to gaze upon me
Whom you will know in the long hereafter,
Now, my guest, be seated here and tell me
All the hope and yearning that is in you."
And when he had told her all, she answered:
"Dare you risk so much upon the chances?
Dare you hope to win so much upon them?
Be it even so, if so you wish it.
You may go hence with the wealth of Hades
And have won a life on earth forever;
You may go hence even as you came here;
And you may depart a king no longer
And a mortal with no life hereafter.
That which is to be the dice will tell you."
And they sat among the burning braziers,

In the vastness of the jewelled palace,
With the leaden light upon their faces,
Watched each other, threw the dice, and wagered.

IV

Pelteh, the groom, declared it was a shame
The way the stable contracts fell that year.
His cousin was a better harness-maker
Than any in the capital, and yet,
Although he had bid low, he did not get
One single contract; and the men who did
Skimped their work shamelessly, and got full pay,
All the awards were by rank favoritism,
And the inspection was a perfect farce,
So that the harness, although it was handsome,
Wore out in no time, and its cleaning gave
No end of trouble; why, the very yoke
They 'd used that night was absolutely botched,
And it was stuffed with some cheap, worthless padding
Unfit for any decent noble's stable,
Much less the King's. The hostler said 't was true;
And, in the purchasing of feed, the like
Was usual. The barley had been bought,
By the connivance of the overseer,
Of a rich cousin of the butcher's wife—
Who was the overseer's friend, perhaps
More than his friend. It was up to the samples;
Yes, it was perfect barley, but the price
Was most outrageous. As for the promotions,
Not only in the stable-force, but also
In all the household of the worthy King

Not one was for real merit. Wire-pulling
And bribery and favor did it all.
And here the other two chimed in, all three
Talking at once of the quite grievous way
Their talents had not gotten recognition,
"Although, of course," the officer went on,
"If the King knew, 't would all be managed right,
No sort of blame attaches to the King,
It would be treason even to hint that:
It is his underlings that do him wrong
And go against his orders:" and the others
Gave an assent emphatic as 't was quick.

V

Silent was the Queen, the monarch silent,
And monotonously from the dice-box
Fell the dice, monotonously clicking,
Till, unto the ears of Rhampsinitos
It appeared as if the columns echoed
Every click, however faint it sounded.
And the flowing of his blood environed
All his senses with a steady booming
Like the flow of subterranean water.
He had wagered all his mighty jewels,
And the Queen the half of Hades' treasure,
And the King had won. Upon the next throw
He had won the whole of Hades' treasure.
He had lost it, lost his own, his cattle,
Lost his armies, lost his fleet, his kingdom,
Wagered his own soul, won back his kingdom,
Won his fleet, won back again his losses,

Won all Hades' treasure, staked it wholly
On one throw against a life forever
For himself on earth, a man and living.
He had won it, and the Queen's great eyelids
Gently brushed her pale cheeks with their lashes,
For he did not sigh nor laugh nor triumph.
"Is it all, and is it not sufficient?
Is there anything beyond you wish for
Rhampsinitos? Will you risk a wager
Still, for anything, who have won thus much?
If you wish to, speak, the time is passing."
And the King, his cheeks aflush with triumph,
Gripped the dice-box with his mighty fingers,
And his breath came hard, and he was silent.
But her eyes still questioned, and he answered:
"Yea, O Queen, and could I live forever,
And alone, and loveless, and without her?
Could I take delight in any living
Even now, if I were always certain
I must live on earth, when she had left it?
But we two, we two, a life eternal
Were but short for us in earth or heaven!"
And the great Queen, laughing low, made answer:
"Shall it not be so with men forever?
You have planned and watched and fought and
labored,
You have hungered, suffered thirst and sickness,
Mired thick your chariot-wheels with carnage:
And, when you behold how great the task is
That your soul is bent on, when the knowledge
That a man's life is too short for triumph
Even in a safe and ordered kingdom,—

Much too brief for stable foreign conquest—
When this knowledge makes you well-nigh hopeless;
And when, after you have won a lifetime
Long as all the length of all the ages,
Wherein you may fight, and scheme, and labor
To make all the earth a larger Egypt,
When your immortality is certain
And you have a wealth no man can equal,
All these prizes seem but baby baubles
If you lack the smiling of one woman!
Wager then, my stake is what you wish for."
And the monarch staked his life eternal,
Staked the life that he so much had longed for,
Staked the life that he had won so hardly,
And, his eyes aglow with hope and fervor,
His lips parted in anticipation,
Threw the dice, and leaned to hers to count them.

VI

It was past midnight now; they all had slept
And waked again, and talked, and dozed yet more,
And then talked afterward. Pelteh went on:
"It is n't that I do find fault with life;
It seems, somehow, I can't express myself,
Perhaps I lack the education for it.
Maybe you know, Sir, what I want to say,
And could express it. I can't get it out."
The officer, much flattered, cleared his throat,
And said: "I think I know just what you mean.
I think you feel, as all of us must feel,
How much the world has fallen off in flavor

Since the old times we like to hear about.
We have no men like our old fighting heroes.
War has become a trade. A modern soldier
Is very little better than a clerk
Engrossing documents in a law-office.
We fight, but all the soldiers are machines
Wholly controlled by their superiors.
There is no room for heroism there,
And if there is no heroism in war,
Where in the world will you find any at all?
All, great men and the rabble, poor and rich,
Feel something like this. In the good old days
Farming was an idyllic occupation,
Full of romance and poetry, but now
It is a trade like any other trade.
Egypt was once a land of gods and heroes;
Now we are just a herd of priests and nobles,
Warriors, tradesmen, laborers, and beggars,
Who, all alike, eat, sleep, and drink, and worship,
And die, like cattle, unheroic deaths.
The world is getting old and men degenerate;
The nobles some go down and upstarts some,
Out of the rabble, to fill up their places.
It was not so of old, then every man
Lived out his life in his own proper station,
And found variety and spice in life;
Now 't is all changed." "I see," said Pelteh, sadly,
Checking a full-fed yawn, "I understand you.
In the old days I should have found a groomship
A life full of delight: now it seems sordid
And mean. And in the old days, too, you would
Have found a captaincy far more delightful

Than a full generalship would seem to-day.
The fault is not in either of us, only
The times are to be blamed; they 're dull and tame."
" Exactly so," replied the officer.
And the lean hostler scratched his head and thought.

VII

Losing, winning, losing, and then winning,
Still the dice, that mocked him, never gave him
Mastery of an undying manhood,
And a deathless love to make it blessèd.
And it seemed to him his lips and teeth were
Now no more apart, but grown together
Like the edges of a wound in healing.
As he diced, he wondered could he utter
Any speech again, or was the power,
Of all utterance gone from him for always.
The Queen's forehead, white above her eyebrows
In the leaden light, he kept his eyes on,
For he dared not meet her eyes directly.
Then the leaden lights appeared to waver.
To his fancy their flames seemed to rustle;
The thick sweat was chilly on his temples;
He threw many throws and won no longer.
Then he said: "I have no more to wager!"
And his own voice startled him with wonder.
And the great, calm Queen replied unto him:
"Is there no one on the earth who loves you
With a love so great your ears have heard her
Say her soul is yours alone, forever?"
" Yea!" the King replied, his pulses roaring.

"Wager, then, that soul," the Queen made answer,
"Since it is your own, and you may use it
As it pleases you, now and forever."
Slowly and with awe he said: "I cannot!"
"Then the earth will never more behold you
After one more sunset," said Demeter,
"And you have no life to live hereafter."
And the great King answered her, unsobbing
But his body numb with fear and anguish,
"I will stake it." And she made her wager.
Thrice the King won, thrice again his losses
Brought him to that last unwilling wager.
Then his winnings followed fast each other
Till he had won back his losses wholly,
Won and lost again the wealth of Hades.
Then the Queen, the gold dice in her fingers,
Paused and listened, shook her head, and dropped them,
Saying: "You must cease. The time is over.
You must go back to your earth and kingdom.
Nothing have you lost and have won nothing,
Yet have tasted what no man has known of
Living, save yourself. Behold I give you,
For a token of your noble courage,
This gold napkin, marvellously woven.
Take it, and depart, and peace go with you."

VIII

Toward morn the men, who dared not keep asleep,
And were not able to keep broad awake,
Talked gossip between naps, and groomed the horses;
Ate the remaining lunch that they had brought,

And drank the last of their small stock of wine.
And after much conjecture of one scandal—
Which was the talk of all the court that month—
As they felt quite good friends by now, they came
To guessing their lord's nocturnal errand,
And who the lady was he came to meet,
And how she got there. And the officer
Observed: "As I remarked a short while back,
Our days are nothing if not commonplace.
The King of the most mighty of all nations,
With a good wife he ought to love, can find,
In spite of all his state-craft and war-levies,
No better way to pass his time than this,
To meet some good man's worthless wife in secret.
Could there be anything more unromantic,
Matter-of-fact, and humdrum than all this?
And what must be the state of all the nation,
If the King, even, cannot be a hero
Not because he 's himself and not a hero,
But because modern times are unheroic.
He would not seem a hero if he were one."

IX

All the stars had vanished, save to westward
Where one hung above the purple desert.
Under it the haze was dun and reddish,
And the nearer sand was brown and even.
Southwardly the hills arose behind them,
And to the northward other hills, their fellows,
Loomed disruptedly, blue, gray, and rosy.
Eastward the horizon, steely-colored,

Sundered the clear, hueless sky above it
From the yellow desert, waxing brighter.
The vast river, flowing in its hollow,
Was beyond the reach of any vision:
From beyond it still the daylight flooded
Into the clear air, with an increasing
Volume and an ever quickening outpour.
As the sun arose, the watchers turned them.
And, from out the dim, sand-paven cavern,
Rhampsinitos staggered, racked and shaken,
With blue lips and hollow cheeks and ashen,
Clutching in his hands a royal napkin
Wrought of cloth of gold, and strangely woven.
Though his eyes were terrorless and thoughtful
They beheld as a strange, novel vision
The cool brilliance of the morning sunlight.

TALITH.

(Trochaic Trimeters.)

WHEN a king or queen or prince had died in Egypt,
Or when death had taken any royal being,
After hope was gone and Egypt's loss was certain
Then the servants of the dead enrobed the body
In the costliest and loveliest adornments;
Lavished on it all the stuffs that earth afforded
The most precious; all the gems of the regalia;
Placed it on a catafalque of sable velvet
Tufted over with amazing sombre jewels;
And it lay until the stroke of the next midnight,
'Mid the flickering of perfume-laden cressets,
In the chilly mourning-chapel of the palace.
Then the washers of the dead arrived to claim it,
And disrobed it of all decking and possessions,
And 't was washed and counted with unroyal corpses.
And, thereafter, cunning journeymen embalmed it
Till, inside its triple gilded cedarn coffins,
It was laid within the rock-tombs of the rulers.

In the chapel all the cressets were on fire,
But the mourners all save one had long departed,
For the Queen of Rhampsinitos, King of Egypt,
Lay there silent, and he watched his dead and sorrowed.

He beheld the fretted crown, how it became her;
How her forehead was like wax against the metal;
How the glossy single braid of raven tresses
Showed behind her tiny ear-shell, white and waxen;
How her throat was smothered in the heaps of jewels;
How the silk and fine embroidered robe was lifted
By her breasts, like carven blocks or desert boulders;
How there was not any flowing in her outline,
But the form was suddenly a thing eternal
As the end of all her whims and veering fancies,
Which had always kept him glad with new perfections.
And he marked the fringe of silk and twisted bullion,
And the queenly little feet that showed below it;
And it startled him to see them pink no longer,
But as gray as a cold sunset's final ashes.
In the growing night he paced the chilly chapel
And his thoughts were like an army in a sand-storm,
When there is not any man dare flee, nor any
Dare advance, or dare retreat or plan to face it.
He bethought him how the night was sweeping onward,
How the hours wherein he might do her honor
Were to pass, and she be one of Egypt's corpses,
And a number in their designating numbers,
But, till in her coffin—never to be opened,
Nor be added to nor altered nor amended—
She would be a reachless wish, a nameless absence.
And he blamed himself that all his mighty treasures
Were not heaped upon the floor for her to rest on.
And he counted all the jewels there about her,
Lest some one had been omitted and forgotten,
But there was not one of all that he beheld not.
Then he thought how, in his privatest of treasures,

Lay the napkin he had won at dice in Hades
When he played there with the Queen of the departed,
And had risked and lost his soul, and had rewon it.
And he passed the hanging curtains of the portal;
Passed the guards that stood as mute as tongueless
statues;
Took the napkin from the casket in his vaulted
Crypt that no man save himself might ever enter;
And repaced the corridors and moonlit porches
To the chapel, empty ever since he left it.
For he felt this was the dearest of his treasures
And most hardly won of all that he had gathered,
And he bore it to her that she might be honored
With all honor that the King could spend or lavish.
And he laid it on the catafalque beside her,
For he felt his heart was weakening within him,
And he thought: "I could not watch the washers
strip her
As the law is which the gods will have accomplished."
Therefore he resolved to spread the precious napkin
For a face-cloth on her face when last he kissed it,
And depart and meet his lonely life and joyless
Duty to his subject lands till death should take him.
And he marvelled at her slender girlish fingers
Loaded now with ancient rings of countless value;
And he knew not was this grief or was it stupor,
For he felt a dull and heavy self-effacement.
Then the harsh horn at the gateway of the palace
Grated out a dry and rasping note of warning,
And he knew the washers of the dead were coming,
Though afar off in the miles of pillared palace.
Then he kissed his lost love's lips, and laid the napkin

On her face, and sobbed and rose with firm-set shoulders,
For he knew his life was done except his duties.

But he had not gone a pace before he halted,
Cried a great cry to the tapestries and panels
Of the gilded and nail-studded level ceiling,
For he thought he heard her voice, and feared and trembled.
Then he turned, and she was striving with her wrappings,
And he gasped and wept and laughed and rent the priceless
Webs of silk and chains of gold and massive jewels,
For he saw he was not mad, that she was living.
And her arms were round his neck, and to his kisses
She responded with the fervor of her girlhood.
And they clung together silently, and shivered.
Then she spoke, and in her throat her speaking fluttered:
"O my King, my only love, my precious husband,
I was dead and stood before the gate of Hades,
And the guardians bade me enter in unburied,
And the Queen received me on her throne of silver,
And she told me dreadful Hades could not claim me
Till the hours had gone by, until the midnight.
For if Neith, who is the giver of all wisdom,
Should be pleased to move your heart to use the napkin
Which the Queen of Hades gave you when you left her,
Then I might return again into my body.

For it was for this she gave to you the token
Which is magical to wake the dead it touches,
Since she saw you loved me truly well and wholly,
And she wished that I might live until fate took us
Both together into night that has no morning."
And they shuddered and rejoiced and clung together
Till the Queen fell back again and gasped and fainted.
Rhampsinitos tore the close gigantic curtains
From the latticed southern window of the chapel,
And the night-wind and the moonlight flooded inward.
Then he broke the ropes of pearls and clasps of rubies
That, encumbering her throat, restrained her breathing,
And he scattered far her armlets, rings, and girdle,
Loosing all the silken robes about her body
Till the desert wind upon her brow and bosom
Woke her, and she stirred and panted and recovered.

When the washers of the dead and guards behind them
Entered in, they saw the monarch who was kneeling.
And it seemed that he was raving, for the cerements
Of the corpse were rent and scattered and the jewels
Lay in gushes of bright hues upon the pavement,
And he held her body raised, his arms about it,
And the moonlight and the glare of leaping cressets
Fell upon them, red and white, and both together.
And the priests broke out in whispered prayers and praises,
Of the gods, because they saw that she was living.

EGLON AND EHUD.

(JUDGES iii., 12–20.)

BEFORE the raids and ravagings began,
Ehud came often to my father's house,
And there we played and prattled, boy and girl,
And I delighted in his frank, dark face,
And he was near me most of all the maids.

During the desultory fights and wars,
I saw him often armed among the rest,
And sometimes, going out or coming in,
We greeted briefly, or exchanged a word;
It seemed to me his eyes dwelt long on mine.

Then, when his home was threatened more than ours,
I saw him seldom; later not at all.
He was not with us on the dreadful day
When Moab sacked our city in revenge
For what I know not, and I was enslaved.

After my capture, I was treated well
Not sold nor chaffered for, but set apart
Among the captain's spoils, and presently
Picked out from them with slim, deft-fingered girls
To serve as maidens round the lazy king.

The war was without truce; no man survived
On either side from any fight or siege;
Women and boys were kept if they were liked,
But all grown men were butchered ruthlessly,
Our men as rebels, Moab's in retort.

As the time passed, I heard of victories;
Knew Israel was losing everywhere;
And how indeed could it be otherwise
After so long a servitude, since most
Felt the revolt was hopeless when begun?

Not that our warriors were too weak or few,
Or Moab's men too many or too skilled,
Numbers and spirits were on either side;
But our men needed some one glorious chief,
Keen-souled, quick-handed, famed for some great deed.

The Moabites were chieftained by a score,
All of whose thoughts were Eglon's: he, at home,
Guzzling iced drinks, pampered, bathed, fruit-fed,
fanned,
Heard all reports in silence, slept long sleeps,
And spoke his mind after a day's delay.

Then from the cool, jalousied portico
Where he passed days on his grass-stuffed divan
We women saw some one lean chief come forth,
His lips shut on the whispers he had heard,
With sparkles of success deep in his eyes.

And, after each long guarded interview
Of one alone with Eglon, back he came,

Dust on his gilded armor, without wound,
Leading an undiminished regiment,
And with them wagons bursting with their spoils.

So Israel and Moab knew full well
That were it brother, nephew, favorite,
Uncle, or son who led and struck the blow,
The brain was Eglon's and from him alone
Came Moab's strength and Israel's despair.

Our men had gathered downward from the hills,
And thronged the walled towns nearest the frontier,
Afraid to yield or to disperse toward home,
Lest they be utterly destroyed thereby,
And fearing bitterly to keep at war.

Rumors were bandied back and forth, of doubt,
Of yielding, of surrender: Eglon's eyes
Were lidded close, showing like narrow slits.
He had long conferences with his chiefs,
Young warriors and graybeards from the town.

I brought them drink or water for their hands,
Knocked ere I entered, walked to where they sat,
Saw all eyes watch me as I came and went,
But heard no utterance from any one,
And least the King: so all the other maids.

And yet some spoke of hearing what was said,
Falsely or truly, all reports alike,
The young men were for war, the old for war,
Eglon in doubt, saying the spoil was less
Than the old tribute; less and less worth while.

Then came a story how men of each side
Stood by the huge carved granite images
That are near Gilgal, shouting from afar,
And so conferring, for each justly feared
To come to talking distance and converse.

Then we saw several captains with black brows,
Scowling and glum, saw elders stroking beards,
And after heard the terms called in the court,
We peering through the lattice in the dusk,
For they were cried at evening in the town.

Upon the morrow truce was to prevail;
No Moabite should pass the images
Opposite Gilgal—there was set the bound;
One party might advance from Israel
With presents, and beg mercy from the king.

And it was stipulated rigidly
That but one party might transgress the line,
And they but once; oaths were to be exchanged
That they would come and go without deceit
As without peril, but not any more.

On the next morning we were all bedecked
In silks and jewels, sentries stalked about,
Splendid with costly trappings; majesty
And might were limned in every least detail
So that the embassy might dread and yield.

The envoys came on foot, severely clad,
Muffled in white, slow-paced beneath their loads,
With downcast eyes; I looked at them with shame,

Then gasped and reddened, whitening to the bone
To see my Ehud lead them thus abased.

The king received them in the public hall,
Pillared and tiled, with lattices of stone,
Milk-white and fretted into pattern-work;
And there they laid their packs aside and stood
Mute in a circle, Ehud in the midst.

The king was brief, spoke of the gifts with scorn.
Said he accepted them, they had no better.
If the old tribute be paid up in full
And from henceforward, peace should be declared.
Otherwise war, it was for them to choose.

Ehud replied; spoke soothingly. The terms,
He said, were hard, yet they accepted them;
Asked ten days to disperse in, and disarm
The young irreconcilables; from then
The gatherers of the tax might safely come.

Then Eglon's manner changed; he called for slaves
To bear away the bales; called servitors
To wash his loyal subjects' dusty feet;
Then summoned us to lave their hands and bring
Cool drinks and fruits and honey-cakes for all.

Ehud was seated opposite the king.
It fell to me to hand to him the drink.
He had not recognized me in the throng,
And, when he saw me, his eyes flared with love
And pity, so my weak hand spilled the wine.

The king just grunted; signed me to step near;
Cuffed at my middle with his pudgy hand,
And bade me, as I gasped between my tears,
Stand to one side among the untrained girls.
I leaned against a pillar, white for shame.

Ehud gave me one look; arose to go
When the king signified it was his will.
They left the palace seeming satisfied,
And I, escaping from my comrades' jeers,
Watched from the roof toward Gilgal as they went.

I saw them pass the statues; saw that one
Tarried; then with the royal officers
I saw the man return, and knew from far
Ehud, and marvelled what might bring him back,
Hoping all things, yet fearing most for him.

I slipped down as he entered, saw him led
Into the cabinet which faced the north,
An upper room next the veranda there,
Thick-walled and doored, and lighted from above,
And saw all servants ordered thence away.

I listened next the guard-room, heard the talk.
He had declared that private enemies
Of his had led the outbreak; he would name
These to the king—his fellows must not guess.
They knew the king so wished and led him back.

Then I was seized with disregard of life,
Stole near the cabinet, found him so obeyed

That no one had remained even on guard,
And then I found a key-hole and peeped in,
Saw Ehud sitting, heard what each one said.

Eglon was on his sofa, lolled at length.
Wine, fruits, and ice upon a tabouret
Stood close beside him. He was pleased and smiled;
Asked for the names again and licked his lips;
Then queried was there something more to tell.

Ehud arose. I saw his face and gasped:
"I have a message from the Lord our God,"
He said, and caught his gullet with one hand,
Fumbling under his burnoose with his left,
Both straining, till the sofa-framing creaked.

Eglon's loose robe came off; his great gross thighs
Had hairless patches, and were splotched with red.
His belly was in folds to near his knees.
I heard the rattle in his breathless throat;
Then saw the glitter of a sheathless blade.

Fat as he was his strength was wonderful.
Ehud held on and worked with skill and plan,
Not hurried nor excited, watched his chance,
And drove the dagger at his navel deep
So that it vanished inward, hilt and all.

Then he took both hands to the blueing throat;
Endured the buffets of the aimless hands;
Set his knee on the fluctuating chest,
And held till there was silence. Then he rose,
Arranged his dress, and came to where I was.

The broad veranda was so built and set
That no one from the courts or terraces
Could see into it, while it gave a view
Afar, across the mountains and the plain,
Even to Gilgal by the watercourse.

He set the door wide; winced at sight of me;
Then clasped me close, and questioned with his eyes:
"Safe, safe," I panted, "maid among his maids.
But you? Your oath! You are forsworn. Oh hurry!
What have you done! They are coming. Alas, alas!"

He chuckled silently: "They will not come,"
He said, "till Eglon calls, and I misdoubt
But he will keep good silence till I win
Far beyond Gilgal. Listen now to me.
I must be brief, and I must tell you all.

"I thought you killed; heard of your body found;
Came here without ambition to submit;
Had in my heart no treachery; but, when
That cursèd tallow-bladder struck at you,
The whole scheme flashed upon me in a breath.

"He would have granted peace now long ago
Save that our ringleaders he could not clutch.
And, in the hope of that, he kept at war,
Till, wearied by his lack of revenue,
He turned his mind to peace as you have seen.

"And, when you whimpered, this thought came to me,
With it my plan, how I could pass the bound;
Be set free of my oath. I had a sword

Ready for treachery to sell my life
As dearly as might be; I saw the deed.

"And so I did; the sight of what you bore
Gave to me craft, and gave me strength and sleight.
Now it remains to carry out the best
Of my device. I mean to rouse our men,
And sweep this horde of robbers to the grave.

"Slip out at nightfall; hide among the rocks
Between the three wild-olives, near the cliff;
Wait there whatever happens. If I fall,
I shall set trusty eyes to seek for you.
If I survive the assault, myself will come."

He left me; went inside the cabinet;
Barred all its doors; passed out on the other side;
And went his way to Gilgal. I could see
The speck I took for him pass the carved rocks,
And reach my people's camp, and still I watched.

I dared not slink away, lest I be seen.
Two women came upon me at the door.
Questioned, I answered 't was at his command
I came now toward the dusk; he heeded not
My knocking. "Hush," they said, "and come away."

The night was pitchy dark; I found the place
Ehud had told of; watched our men creep up;
Saw beacons on the hilltops; heard the shouts;
Beheld the palace fired, and the fight;
And knew our men were victors everywhere.

Then came a weird and unforgotten sight:
Great fires were kindled at the river fords,
Reddening the shallows with their plenteous glare,
So that each ripple stood out visible,
And nothing living could keep hid at all.

And thus they trapped all Moabites who fled,
And butchered them at every pass and ford.
Before the dawn, my Ehud came to me,
And took me home in triumph. Here I dwell,
Beholding Israel honored and at peace.

SHAMGAR.

And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox-goad: and he also delivered Israel.—JUDGES, iii., 31.

I

A HALF-CLAD mountain boy, who swung his goad,
Trod lightly up the narrow, flinty road,
Sparing his oxen at each steeper turn.
Below, in choked rock-clefts, the spluttering burn
Gurgled and churned, and the cart's rough-hewn pole
Creaked in the yoke with every swing and roll
Of the slow hulks that drew it. From the wall,
That showed afar above, an evening call
Sank through the windless interspace, a far
Faint ghost of sound. There in the east one star
Showed by the towers. The western sky was white.
Below the hills the pinions of the night
Covered the plain, save where some water shone,
A mirror in the darkened space, alone.
A sharp turn brought him to a level place
Where under close trees for a little space
The road clung to the cliff; the branches made
An archway where the sable shadows weighed
Upon his eyes. When it was almost past,
A shade upon its outlet there was cast,

And in the opening a figure stood
Against the sky, framed by the rock and wood,
Like a dark warrior graven on the field
Of a smooth, oval, shining, silver shield.
The oxen halted. Shamgar, weak with fear,
Leaned on the cart. The Philistine, his spear
Levelled, approached him, laughed with scornful joy
To see the slender, narrow-shouldered boy;
Gestured; then dropped his spear-head to the ground,
While Shamgar, trembling, turned his oxen round.
And then, with words he did not understand,
Shamgar beheld him ask, with outstretched hand,
The goad, and bid him walk along before—
Trusting the dread the desert raiders bore
To all around, to keep the boy from flight.
A wave of blood washed over his drowned sight;
His brain was stormed with hate and mastering fears;
And all the deaths were yelling at his ears.
Burning and blind, he struck one random blow,
Hopeless and maddened, at his towering foe:
And then, before his raging dread took shape
In flight, or his thews loosened to escape,
The armored hulk fell prone across his path,
And wondering triumph trampled out his wrath.
He snatched the slain man's dirk, and, in one leap,
Between his beard and gorget drove it deep;
And then, borne down by rage, success, and fears,
Fell, weak and limp, and struggling with his tears.
Mastering himself, he rose, and from the dead
Stripping the corselet, from the shaggy head
Pulled off the helmet, and almost with awe
Felt the crushed temple-bone and glowing, saw

How deep the blow had broken. On the wain
He heaped his spoils; turned his slow beasts again;
Passed safely up the roadway to the town;
Through gathering mists and shadows swart and brown;
And, when the battered, grimy gates were wide,
Passed in, with shouts of praise from every side,
To greet the eyes of her he hoped for bride.

II

An instant his heart ceased to beat; he stood gasping; then he
Dashed forward. As, mightily panting, he ran, he could see
That neither the house nor the crops nor the stacks by the barn
Had been fired. Much plunder was left. The tracks by the tarn
Were a score. Through his home, in a breath, just a bare glance he took.
It was silent; no corpse; nothing living. He gave one more look
At the footprints. No marks were there there of small, sandalless feet.
His girdle he tightened; his cloak dropped, and silent and fleet,
He set off up the face of the hill, through the saplings and brush;
Reached the crown of the first in a steady, untiring rush;
There he stopped; felt the ground; gazed about, and looked backward and out

Down the slope and around toward the plain. It was here that their scout
Had kept watch for his coming, and had given warning for flight.
But the path up the rocks was untrodden; by that on the right
The watcher had hurried to join with his mates. His ascent
He resumed, and from midday till twilight he steadily went
Up the bare, broken hills, and crossed over the steep craggy crest,
After hours of tireless running, and still without rest
In the moonlight he dashed down through wooded ravines, tore through vines,
Burst laboredly into low thickets or raced under pines
On the crisp, polished floors of dry needles. Near midnight, at last
He stopped in a slope of dense briars, and heavily cast
His wearied-out body on earth, and lay shaking and weak,
His limbs all a-quiver with heat, too exhausted to speak.
He lay still, he breathed slower, he listened. A little below
The road was all white in the moon-rays, and softly and slow
In the distance the patter of hoofs and the heavier sound

Of feet hastening and weary with leagues of uneven
hard ground
Emerged faintly from out of the silence, a whispering
rhyme
Of movement. He rose, breathed a prayer that
he had been in time.
His goad in his right hand, he crept near the brink
of the bank,
And into the bushes and shadows he noiselessly
sank.
The sheep came in sight and behind them were two of
the band,
The rest were ahead and among them . . . he tightened
his hand.
The ragged and footsore marauders, still followed
by fears
Of pursuit and recapture, looked backward, all
trailing their spears.
Their eyes on the roadway behind and their minds
all a-chafe
At the leagues yet before they would reach the rock-
pass and be safe.
The brushwood stirred somewhat above them, the
branches were rent
As though by a huge, rolling boulder a landslide
had sent
Down the slope: a dark form leapt the bank, and before
they could know
What to look for, the terrible goad had laid six of
them low.
Like bulrushes broke at its blows the long shafts
of their spears

As they set on him, dazed and made slow by the clog
of their fears.
The drivers behind the checked flock heard the cry:
"It is he!"
And turned back without looking, all breathless and
silent, to flee.
The two that had guard of the woman found all of
their strength
Would not hold her, and now there were eight who
lay writhing at length
With limbs broken, or, still, with crushed skulls in
the gravelly road,
And unwounded he stood, and whirled round him the
terrible goad.
Their leader, girt on with a sword, set upon him, and
he
Fell also, his bones crushed and rent at the joint of
the knee.
The cravens fell back at the sight, and the ill-fated
pair,
Struggling still with the woman, he set on and slew
unaware;
In a niche in the rock she crouched cowering behind
him. The swell
Of his blood was aflame with success, and his mighty
blows fell
More surely; his vast sable beard hardly stirred in
the wind,
And the raiders, still snarling and fierce, but their
band sadly thinned,
Pressed round him, ashamed to give way to one
unaided foe,

Each unwilling to be first to flee, and all longing to go.
His eyes flashed in the moonlight; his height seemed to grow; they were awed
By the girth of the man; and his shoulders seemed wondrously broad.
The bravest ran under his guard; pierced his thigh; but the rest
Stood aghast when one blow crushed in the ribbed arch of his chest.
He dashed in among them; one dropped, his jaw broken, and one
Reeled back with an arm dangling helpless; the fighting was done.
All turned them and fled, some toward home, for their lives, down the steep,
And a brace up the road through the midst of the terrified sheep.
Their steps died away in the moon-dusk, and he was alone
With the quivering woman whose sobbing had sunk to a moan.
He turned, and his arms were around her, his face by her face,
And their love and rejoicing forgot both the time and the place.
The stampeded sheep gathered bleating; the rising wind roared;
The wounded men groaned in the road; Shamgar searched for the sword;
Then the moanings were still. When at last the scared oxen were found,

He stripped off the arms of the dead, and upon them
he bound
The spoils on the heaped sacks of plunder they even
yet bore;
The dead men he counted, and sought in the darkness
for more.
The sheep and the oxen turned homeward; he set out
to wend
The slow march to the home he had made, and knew
how to defend,
With the wife he had saved once again, his beloved.
The sun rose;
And fifteen fresh notches the goad had to tell of
his foes.

III

Why are the raiders so cautious, and why do they
go
Hundreds together, close-marching and scouting
and slow;
They that ranged over the country by couples and
threes,
Laden with booty, wherever they found it to seize?
They have been taught that a score may be scattered
like chaff:
Swords are as glass to the blows of a tough-knotted
staff.
Dwellers that quaked in the cities, the thickest of
wall,
Fight in the open, when Shamgar has sounded the
call.

They that fled quicker than jackals in the earlier days
Fight, when he leads them, like lions in hope of his praise.
Yea, and more dreaded than squadrons with serried-set shields
Shamgar himself is to all that range woodlands or fields.
Is it the corpse of their cousin the raiders have found?
Crushed ribs and skull tell their tale to the blood-sodden ground.
Are their spies certain he dwells in his homestead at rest?
Leagues over country that night he slays one of their best.
Is it a warrior is missed from the council or feast?
Yea, then the goad has one notch that is freshest, at least.

IV

Even as he fell, a shout arose
From the hillside, and his thronging foes
Glanced behind, and turned themselves and fled,
Leaving all their wounded and their dead
Where they fell. The rescuers pursued,
Fresh and fierce and eager. Crimson-hued
Every sword and spear was before noon,
And the slaughter ceased not till the moon
Sank into the embers of the sun;
And of those that fled was left not one.

Hot and grim the victors hastened back,
Guided by their own corpse-bordered track,
Whereon none of them had taken harm.
With the dawn they reached the wailing farm,
Sixty henchmen, woundless one and all,
And his seven sons, black-browed and tall.
There they found the women on the ground,
With the untouched bodies all around.
And his mighty corpse, untouched as well,
On the sill, lying as he fell.
When rebuked the slave-women replied:
"She is still as though herself had died
And we dared not touch him save she bade,
We who are not worthy." The sons made
With their hands a bier, but when they came
To uplift him, awe without a name
Froze their limbs and speech. For he lay there,
His eyes gazing without threat or glare,
His vast silver beard upon his breast,
Hiding all his wounds, as though at rest.
But his right hand gripped the mighty goad,
Whereon clotted blood and hair still showed
How it had been wielded, and so tight
That the knuckles needed three men's might
To unlock them. Reverently they laid
On the bier his body, all afraid
As they touched it; counted then the dead,
And the goad's old tale of notches read
Some five hundred notches and threescore,
And his sons cut on it forty more.

THE LEVITE.

(JUDGES, xix., 27.)

YEA, I have looked upon vengeance, beheld the sword how it smote them,
Seen the accursed destroyed with their wives and henchmen and tribesmen,
Till but a handful were left wherein ran the blood of their people,
Barely a handful, and all of them were assuredly guiltless.
Nevertheless I cannot find rest or peace for me living,
Nor any troubleless sleep till I wake in the grave from all dreaming.
Still I behold, awake or asleep, the gore-dripping panniers;
Still my fingers creep with the tingling of flesh as I cut it.
How can I drop to sleep, when every drowsiness brings me,
Back to my aging senses, my weariness after our journey?
What can lull me to rest when I feel again how she lulled me?
Lulled me that very night with tender words and with whispers;

Soothed me gently to sleep, her fingers cool on my
forehead,
So that, as a man is aware in dreams of noises that
are not,
In such wise, and no other, the insolent, riotous
knocking,
Thundering at the gates like the hoofs of cattle
stampeded,
Came to my sleep-walled ears like the croon of waves
on the sea-beach.
How can I sleep when sleep reminds me I might have
wakened;
Might have wakened, and saved her, and kept her
living and with me?
How can I look on the sun when I feel how it rose
and beheld me
Stunned and sunk in a stupor beside her there on the
doorstep?
For I awoke before dawn and found that she was not
beside me.
Therefore I rose in haste, for I thought she had
risen before me,
So that she might prepare all things for our early
departure.
And, when I opened the door, I saw her sunk on the
threshold
Dead and scarcely cold, and her rose-leaf fingers
were weakly
Curled, like wilting petals, and fallen against the
woodwork
On the outside of the cruel door that she could not
open.

Yea, and the air was cool, and the stars above us were paling;
All the eastern sky was green as a precious stone is,
And the horizon warmed with crimson wondrously painted.
Yet I cursed the sky and the night and sleeping and waking.
How can I live, and be with these memories still in my keeping?
How can I sleep and forget, when I hear her agonized crying?
Hear in my dreams her voice that calls in despair and terror;
Calls in a turmoil and spasm of fear that cannot be silent;
Cries out because it must, and struggles and yearns for rescue;
And yet smothers its crying with dread of what may befall me,
Dread its accents thrill with, lest perchance I should hear it.

BENAIAH.

καὶ αὐτὸς κατέβη καὶ ἐπάταξε τὸν λέοντα ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ λάκκου ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς χιόνος.—II SAMUEL, xxiii, 20.

WEEKS, two weeks, of cold had dwelt about us,
And the mountain beasts were starved and savage.
All the sky was slaty gray at sunset
Save the gory-hearted west horizon;
And before the night was well upon us,
From the sad, uncolumned vault a snowflake
Fell into the bosom of my sister.
From the windless sky the powdered feathers
Sank straight down through the unstirred night-silence
Till the moonless darkness was illumined
With a dusty and unearthly glimmer.
And we doubted of Benaiah's coming,
For the rock paths of the treeless mountains
Grow impassable with icy glazing;
And we knew the leagues were surely slower
To traverse, if he should be persistent.
But my sister's eyes had no doubt in them,
While she sat and gazed into the embers,
And her neck was curved as if she hearkened.
Slowly, log by log, the roaring fire
Crumbled into coals half hid by ashes,

And my brothers rose up to restore it.
Then her face changed, as if she heard him,
And she loosed the bolts inside the doorpost;
Flung the door wide with a joyful outcry;
And we saw, in the uncertain darkness,
Two huge, glassy, yellow eyeballs shining;
Heard the roar that drowned her smothered screaming;
Saw the massive, tawny shape above her,
All in one half breath; and there was nothing
Save the blood-stained snow about the doorway,
When we dashed outside with brands and lances.
But our brands died while the trail still led us,
And we slunk home weeping in the darkness
Wherein now no snowflakes were falling.
All night long we sat awake and speechless,
With the doorway barred, and on the fire
Heaps of faggots crackling and enkindling,
While the women wailed and mourned above us.
In the gray of dawn we saw Benaiah
Striding through the pines against the sky-line,
On the frozen ravine's farther cliff-top.
None of us dared face him, or the love-light
In his yearning eyes as he approached us;
None made any answer when he questioned,
Till a tiny girl-child, weeping, pointed
To the red trail in the frozen snow-crust.
All his face was rigid as a dead man's,
And he strode away, his scabbard clanking,
Tramping in the claw-prints; but he had not
Given any sign of understanding,
And his lips and eyes had made no movement.
When we plucked up heart and followed after,

We beheld him in a ruined cistern,
Full three fathoms deep, and walled with boulders.
He was sitting down collapsed and shrunken,
By a something which I blenched to look at.
The blown snow was not so deeply drifted
But that we could see in it some fragments,
Frayed and battered, which had been a lion.

DEIOCES.

AMONG the doubtful, mute conspirators
The youngest rose and spoke: "The first sent out
Has failed or faltered. Send another man
Who may do better. Let us cast the lots;
Or, if you all approve me, I will try."
The oldest plotter tugged his grizzled beard,
And said: "The slave-girl, our confederate,
Is not suspected, and she waits without.
After we hear the story which she brings,
We shall be better ready to decide."
The girl came in, not wholly at her ease
Among those huddled faces, row on row,
Crafty or fierce, according to their years.
She said: "He entered as had been agreed.
The moon was high among the quiet stars.
Its light was stencilled on the silent floors
A hand's-breadth wide below the lattices;
Enough of light there was to see his way,
Too little for him plainly to be seen.
The King's slow breathing guided him along.
I could not hear his foot-falls as he went.
I watched him till he was beside the bed;
Then moved a trifle from the aperture

That I might truly swear I had not seen.
I heard a stir and movement from the bed,
The planting of two firm unhurried feet.
I looked again. The King was there, erect,
His right hand held Harbanus by the throat;
His left hand gripped him by the armed right wrist.
He did not sway. I could not hear him breathe.
Harbanus writhed and presently let drop
The dagger, and it fell upon the bed
And made no noise. The King moved inch by inch,
And yet without an effort, as it seemed,
Took up the dagger, drove it firm and deep,
And then, as gently as a father might
Lay in its cot to rest his sleeping child,
Lowered the body slowly to the floor.
I was afraid to run or slink away,
And saw him climb again into the bed,
Cover himself, and soon I heard him breathe
As evenly as early in the night.
It was half daylight when he called at length.
I was among the women of that watch,
And mingled with the others: 'Send some slaves,'
He told us calmly. 'Have them clean the floor.'
And then he turned and slept or seemed to sleep.
When he arose, Phraortes, white and tense,
Asked why he had not called the palace guards.
'What need for guards when I had killed the fool?'
His father answered in his placid tones.
'There might have been another,' said his son.
'Well,' said the King, 'and had there been a score
Which do you fancy they would have preferred,
To enter as he did or stay without?' "

After the girl had left, the plotters sat,
Eying each other long, while no man spoke.
When finally one warrior rose he said:
"This man we chose is certainly our king."

THE TITAN.

BEFORE young Jove harangued the clouds,
Before Poseidon trod the waves
And shook the earthquakes from their shrouds,
Before Dis numbered all the graves,
The Titans governed all,
And Kronos was their king;
And each thing, great and small,
Remained the self-same thing.

The fairest of the Titan throng,
The strongest and most filled with pride,
Was he who ruled the world of song,
Whose tunes re-echoed far and wide:
Loving his perfect wife,
Placid, content, and grave;
His music filled his life,
And made its lord its slave.

He sang of restful, perfumed noon;
Of sunsets in immortal skies;
Of waters silvered by the moon;
Of morns when suns were glad to rise;
Of pleasant sounds and sights;
Of easy streams and ways;
Of storm-forgotten nights;
And tuned, discordless days.

Instinctive, with no thought of choice,
He sang with all the woods in spring;
But the gaunt forest's winter voice
He did not hear and could not sing:
The blue gulf's tropic calm
He echoed note for note;
But never the vast psalm
From the storm-wrenched night-sea's throat.

The sun-baked sand-waste's husky groan,
The ice-field's startled, tortured roar,
The thoughtful pine-land's midnight moan,
The blind caves in the ocean's floor,
And all things fraught with fears,
Touched by a test or smart,
Were shut from out his ears
And known not by his heart.

Men's harvest festivals he hymned,
Their wedding fervor and their mirth;
And all their days by care undimmed,
And all the pleasures of their earth;
Their lives lived out in vain,
Their anvils' sobs that rang,
Their passion and their pain,
He neither guessed nor sang.

Beloved by Titans and by men,
He felt his songs pervade the days;
Heard his tunes echoed back again
Fulfilled with earth's and heaven's praise:

Without a fault or flaw
They were the stars' decree,
And the earth's tidal law
Attuning land and sea.

And he, the lord of harmony,
Found heaven dear and earth delight,
Both made of his own melody
And goodly to his sense and sight;
And often he would go
Far from his home above,
To taste from men below
Their worship and their love.

Where King Admetus ruled the land,
He strolled once through bright meadow-slopes,
Between the forest and the strand,
And met—his eyes ablaze with hopes—
The eager shepherd lad
Who watched the monarch's sheep,
Fair-haired, his blue eyes sad,
Smiling, and quick to weep.

And breathless and unasked he spoke:
"My Lord, you sing such perfect songs!
In my heart, too, the songs awoke
Long since: the clamped earth's pains and wrongs,
Its labors and its fears,
Its cold and bitter heat,
Blend strangely in my ears
In rare strains, new and sweet.

"And what I sing I do not know,
And vainly do I wonder why,
And with the days my hopes still grow
That men will hear me by and by:
Some good thing for the land
May be in every word.
Your race might understand,
If through your help they heard."

The kind eyes saw, and saw him not,
The soothing hand half stroked his hair,
The lips that answered half forgot
All, save their own songs everywhere:
The Titan, whom no woes
Had touched, who knew but joy,
Knew not a young god grows
Like any other boy.

"My son," he said, "sing and be glad,
But sing no troubles, throes, or fears.
Be calm. No healthy heart grows mad.
Dream not to reach the Titans' ears.
Unto their homes no word of
Your songs, like smoke upcurled
May rise: yours are unheard of
And my songs fill the world."

And, pacing toward the white-walled town,
With satisfied, rapt eyes and ears,
He did not see the boy's quick frown,
Nor hear the tempest of his tears:

Nor mark how soon his grief
Merged in a sombre song,
Thin, like an autumn leaf,
And quivering, but strong.

But, when afar, the songs pursued
His senses, blotted out his own,
And frighted him with vague, subdued
Suggestions of far fields unmown.
And all his heart was stirred,
And told of everything
That he had never heard
And he could never sing:

The rest that comes but after toil;
The gladness that is born of pain;
The justice that no sin can foil;
The strength that can hope on in vain:
Beauty that contrast gives;
How peace comes out of strife;
How trust contends and lives,
And death illumines life.

Then many ripening ages passed,
And imperceptibly as frost
Revokes its settled seals at last,
Withdraws and dwindles and is lost,
The Titans' rooted strength,
So perfect in its days,
Dissolved away at length
As though a morning haze.

Jove ruled and all the gods were throned,
Apollo's songs, all warmth and light,
Through heaven and through earth intoned
Their twin threads, woven dark and bright:
The tempests and the stars,
The free, glad buds that sprang,
The cowed things galled by bars,
Together woke and sang.

From every drowning seaman's breath,
From gasps of women's breaking hearts,
From shame, despair, and sin, and death,
From petty chafings of the marts,
From qualms that blench and pine,
From hates unclean and mute,
He wrung sweet songs, like wine
Pressed from the tortured fruit.

No longer now for happy lords
And never for dulled, hapless slaves
The star-songs pulsed: in full accords
They searched not only homes but graves.
And all things dear and dread,
That foster and destroy,
Sang out, the days that bled
With days that burst for joy.

And in the air the new songs thrilled
The unregarded Titan fared
Through fields and woods his songs had filled,
Where his old notes of pride had blared,

And there Apollo met
Him, from the days foregone
A wraith that lingered yet;
A starlet quenched by dawn.

The Titan, aged and sad, besought:
"In your best music's perfect bloom
Can there be granted space for naught
Of my songs to survive my gloom?
Your strains are true and strong,
But men loved mine of old.
Surely they were not wrong,
Some of my tunes were gold?"

The young god answered, clear and swift,
"I asked you once, in my lone youth,
A little patience to uplift
To ears enthroned my hope and truth:
The help you might have lent
To me in my distress,
My strength and yearning blent,
You did not even guess.

"But this thing which you ask of me
Could not be brought to pass again
By them that rule the sky, the sea,
The births, the souls, the graves of men:
The distance is immense
Between our sundered arts,
For your songs pleased men's sense,
And my songs stir men's hearts.

"This thing Jove's thunder could not give,
Nay, nor could god-compelling fate:
Your songs had their own time to live,
This present is for them too late:
The vague old time was rotten,
Its phantoms' wings are furled,
And your songs are forgotten,
And my songs fill the world."

THE LAST BOWSTRINGS.

THEY had brought in such sheafs of hair,
And flung them all about us there
In the loud noonday's heat and glare:
Gold tresses, far too fine to wind,
And brown, with copper curls entwined,
And black coils, black as all my mind.

In the low, stifling armory,
Whence we could hear, but might not flee,
The roar of that engirdling sea,
Whose waves were helmet-crests of foes,
Winding the cords we sat, in rows,
Beside a mound of stringless bows.

Since the first hill-scouts panted in,
Before siege-fires and battle din
Filled night and day, and filled within
Our hearts and brains with flame and sound,
We had sat, huddled on the ground,
Our tears hot on the cords we wound.

We knew, when the first tidings came,
That not the gods from death or shame
Could save us, fighting clothed in flame.

The mid-sea's marshalled waves are few
Beside the warriors girt with blue
The gorged hill-passes then let through.

Their spears shook like dry wind-stirred reeds
Stiff in a marsh's miles of reeds;
Loud blared the neighing of their steeds;
The whole wide land beneath the stars
Felt, from wheel ruts, or fierce hoof-scars,
The deluge of their rumbling cars.

Against our walls their flood was dammed,
Within which, till each porch was jammed,
Farm-folk and fisher-folk were crammed:
Heaped stones inside the gates were piled,
While all above us, calm and mild,
In bitter scorn the heavens smiled.

Our men dwelt on the walls and towers,
From over which, for endless hours,
The hissing arrows flew in showers;
The sling-stones, too, came crashing down,
As though the gods of far renown
Hurled thunderbolts into the town.

Where the hung temples showed their lights
Some women prayed upon the heights;
Some stole about throughout the nights,—
Who bore the warriors food by day,—
Gleaning the arrows as they lay
That they might hurtle back to slay.

And where the rooms were heaped with stores,
Because the stringless bows were scores,
We were shut in with guarded doors;
All day at hurried toil we kept,
And when the darkness on us crept
We lay, each in her place, and slept.

Quick as we worked, we could not make
Strings fast as bowmen came to take
Fresh bows: and, oh, the grinding ache
Of hearts and fingers: maid and slave
And princess, we toiled on to save
Home that already was our grave.

Six days we wound the cords with speed;
Naught else from us had any heed,
For bitter was our rage and need.
At last, upon the seventh day,
Into the fury of the fray
They called our very guard away.

No food was brought us. Faint with thirst,
What wonder was it if, at first,
Some wailed that the town gates were burst?
If later, to the last embraces
Of child or mother, from their places
Some slunk away with ashen faces?

I cursed them through the door unbarred;
I vowed I would not move a yard,
Lest some one man of ours, pressed hard,

Might be left weaponless alone.
Until I died or turned to stone,
I would wind were the hair mine own.

A sudden shiver shook my frame,
I looked up with my face aflame;
But, oh, no tongue has any name
For the despair I saw enthroned
In my love's eyes, all purple-zoned!
I smiled to greet him, and I groaned.

He buckled on a fresh cuirass,—
His own was but a tattered mass
Of gory thongs. I saw him pass
Out of the portal; with good-byes
And blessings filled, and yearning sighs,
For the last time I saw his eyes.

Each moment, all my blood areel,
I felt the thrust of deadly steel
I knew his body soon must feel.
My heart was choked with prayerful speech;
The high deaf gods were out of reach;
My eyes dry as a noonday beach.

More cowards left. Few now remained.
Still at our task we strove and strained
With bleeding hands and iron-brained;
And still my fingers all were fleet,
Though in my temples burned and beat
The murmur of the stunning heat.

There rushed in for fresh arms just then
Some of our allies,—small dark men;
It slowly dawned upon my ken
That one, who by a spear-heap kneeled,
Fierce-browed and grimy from the field,
Carried my brother's painted shield.

My heart beat in long, tearing throbs;
Sharp torchlights stormed my eyes in mobs;
And my breath came in rasping sobs;
The tears from both my cheeks I wrung;
So wet my hands were that they clung
Slipping along the cord I strung.

Mutely we toiled until my maid,
Her lips tense as the strands she laid,
Grew wan; her deft quick fingers strayed:
Then she pitched forward with a groan,
And lay, white, motionless, and prone.
I wound on hastily, alone.

Harsh and unevenly outside
Shields clanged. Men called, and cursed, and cried;
And when again the latch was tried
My knife lay somewhere on the floor.
Alas! I found it not before
Three armored foemen burst the door.

KRANAË.

DROWNED, weed-grown crags the waters hide
Far under the Ionian sea
Once flashed aloft in gleaming pride
The sunlit peaks of Kranaë.

Blue waves, turned silver-surf in ranks,
Played round her cliffs, white, clean, and high,
Cool forest-leafage clothed her flanks
In shimmering green against the sky.

Between sharp reefs an entrance wound
Into the port, where, sheltered well,
The tiny, white-walled town shone round
Its temple and its citadel.

No change their island world had neared
From mobs to self-reliance schooled,
Obeyed and honored, loved and feared,
Their orphaned king unquestioned ruled.

The posted watchers on the height
Conned all the sky-rim, island-free,
And if strange sails appeared in sight
Signalled the fishing-craft to flee.

One day at dusk, short-breathed and pale,
  Their runners roused the town to fear,
A war-fleet of a hundred sail
  Out of the east was drawing near.

They waited, every man arrayed,
  Their galleys out as channel-guards,
But lo! the stranger-ships displayed
  Green olive-sprays from prows and yards.

They found them Greeks in race and speech
  Bound from Phocæa, on the quest
Of homes out of the Persians' reach
  In Corsica, beyond the west.

They beached their ships along the shore,
  The cliff-hung, scythe-shaped sweep of sand
Where, such uncounted years before,
  Paris and Helen came to land.

A long curved row of fires burned,
  And with their crimson radiance dyed
The cliffs, the strand, the sable-sterned,
  Ranked ships that hid the deep outside.

Black cauldrons swung against the flame,
  Cloaked crouchers round the blaze were warmed,
And in the glare that went and came
  The islanders and voyagers swarmed.

Presents of cattle, fruits, and bread
  The generous folk made haste to bring,
The elders came and at their head
  Their handsome, young, unmarried king.

From group to sea-worn group he went,
Gentle of voice and quick to please,
And left them solaced and content,
Hopeful and cheered and at their ease.

About the farthest fire stood
Tall women with their new-grown girls;
One in a cloak, whose fallen hood
Revealed her rippling, golden curls,

Erinna, daughter of the best
Of all Phocæa's richest men.
Her father, at the king's request,
Called her, presented her, and then

Somehow they drew apart, and soon
Strolled past the ships, where firelight failed,
Voices were blurred, and from the moon
Long sparkles on the water trailed.

The blaze-lit beach was ruddy gold,
The moonlit wave-slopes silver-white,
Around them was the manifold
Sweet mystery of summer night.

They paced, and did not need to speak;
She revelled in his martial air;
He watched the firelight warm her cheek,
The moonlight cool upon her hair.

Their hearts were full; their lips were dumb;
She breathed delight; he could but note
How well rich jewels would become
Her low, broad brow and slender throat.

Too rapt to feel how much they yearned,
To know how much their hearts were stirred,
Back to the camp-fire they returned
And parted there with scarce a word.

After a night of waking dreams,
The king resought the strand at dawn,
And found, before the sun's first gleams,
Swift preparation to be gone.

Amazed and taken by surprise,
He urged the wisdom of delay,
And still he did not realize
What he had hoped for in their stay.

Depart, the leaders said, they must.
Their hardy venture called for haste.
The strong, fair wind that they could trust
Proffered a help they dared not waste.

He watched them drag their galleys down,
Not knowing why he was distressed,
Then sent a runner to the town
To fetch his mother's jewel-chest.

And when the last-launched galley rode
And dipped upon the even swell,
Up to Erinna's folk he strode
To greet her and to say farewell.

He begged her mother's leave to deck
Her forehead with his mother's pearls;
Rubies and emeralds round her neck
He clasped, set deep in golden whirls.

Her father thanked him for his gift;
They went on board; the canvas drew;
He watched the galley plunge and lift
And then grow small against the blue.

He watched the dim specks fade and melt
Into the sky-line, far away,
Not realizing what he felt
Through half the duties of the day.

The midday brought him no repose,
He could not sleep, could only brood,
And still his mind did not disclose
A comprehension of his mood.

His thoughts went westward with the fleet,
He saw them on a hostile coast,
Saw all the dangers they must meet
Swarm round them in a threatening host.

Sly Carthaginians would intrigue
With herdsmen, raiding from the downs,
Ligurian Gauls would join in league
With haughty, fierce Etruscan towns.

He saw Erinna, small and frail,
A timid, brave, pathetic shape,
Dragged on adventures that must fail
Through terrors she could not escape.

In a revealing flash that made
His heart stand still and stopped his breath
He saw assault succeed blockade,
Beheld her capture and her death.

Plain as the sun's clear noonday disk
He saw how precious was to him
This treasure-girl he must not risk
On seas ferocious, wild, and grim.

In a bewildering, dazing dance
He felt his hopes and fears revolve,
Then saw his one remaining chance
And seized it with a swift resolve.

Using his special pride and joy,
The swiftest galley on the seas,
Knowing the lads he would employ,
He could come up to them with ease.

He chose his crew, explained their goal;
All loved him, all were keen and staunch;
And then with an impatient soul
He urged them to prepare and launch.

The wind was fair, but at the oars
His comrades strained for greater speed,
Watching the sunlit island's shores,
Uplands, and dwindling peaks recede.

Straight towards the sunset clouds they drove,
Each man alert, no oar pulled slack,
Then through the dusk and night they clove
The shimmering moonglade's guiding track.

The relays, huddled, lay asleep;
The zealous rowers tugged and sang;
The king steered, leaning on the sweep;
His brain with pride and glory rang,

To think that all this wood and bronze,
  Cordage and sail and sinewed skill,
This speed as graceful as a swan's
  Existed but to work his will.

After the moon was gone, the west,
  As if the sunset reappeared,
Glowed with red Etna's spouting crest
  And toward its gory glare they steered.

Later they saw the mountain loom;
  Then in the starshine they divined
Far headlands beetling in the gloom,
  Black shapes in blackness ill-defined.

Before the eastern sky was gray,
  Before the stars above were weak,
Low down abeam, along a bay,
  They saw a twinkling, ruddy streak.

The oarsmen cheered, and craned to look;
  The sails and yards were stowed. They brought
The ship's head round; she leapt and shook,
  Now headed for the camp they sought.

Lest their approach might cause alarm,
  They beached her softly, with no sound,
Behind the point whose rocky arm
  Sheltered the camp which they had found.

The king advanced alone, and crept
  Past sentries, none of whom awoke,
To where around their fire slept,
  Wrapped in their cloaks, Erinna's folk.

Herself lay on her furs. He thrilled
To see her small, transparent hands
Clasping his gifts in sleep, and filled
With deep-hued gems and golden bands.

Longings for him had filled her heart
Till dreaming of him took their place,
And now, through eyelids slow to part,
She saw the lovelight on his face.

While round the sinking embers drowsed
The camp, the pale-lit shore was mute,
Erinna's kinsfolk were aroused
To pass upon her lover's suit.

He had their liking and respect;
The gifts he offered in exchange
Were far too lavish to reject;
Besides they could not think it strange;

If they should venture to refuse
The maiden he so greatly prized,
He might be goaded on to use
The other means which they surmised:

The serried spearmen who might lurk,
Resolved to win success or fall,
Hid in the morning's mist, to work
His will and answer to his call.

They guessed them ready for a rush;
Saw gifts far more than they could ask;
And saw the warrior's fury flush
Beneath his suave expression's mask

Therefore they gave her. All day long
Beside their galleys they rejoiced;
With wedding-cheers and many a song
Their gladness and their hopes they voiced.

While of her hero she was glad,
To leave her parents she was loath,
But now the kindly breezes had
Veered southward till they favored both.

Before the dusk they started forth
Upon the ending of the feast,
The fleet rowed boldly towards the north,
The bridal galley towards the east.

The sunset reddened sails and spars;
The moonlight silvered all their wake;
The darkness shone with countless stars,
The dawn was just about to break.

Beside the rail the bride and groom
Wakeful and nestled, mute and fond,
Basked in a bliss that left no room
For thought of anything beyond.

They heeded not who watched or steered;
The toil-worn men in silence rowed,
Till Kranaë from the waves appeared,
And back of it the sunrise glowed.

Thus to their loyal home they won,
And shared their palace and their throne
In happiness that was not done
After their children's sons were grown.

The agèd lovers long were dead
And laid at peace among the graves
Before the day of shock and dread
That sunk their isle beneath the waves.

Their doubly-buried marble tomb
Still holds the undivided pair,
Unchanged and lifelike in the gloom,
His jewels round her throat and hair.

THE RETRIBUTION.

IT was after the hosts of the Persian King were utterly scattered and slain
That I made one of a scouting raid through a treeless and waterless plain.
The King and the army had followed fast to the mountains where Bessus had fled,
And we were a hundred rollicking lads with Mathos of Crete at our head.
Our party was one of a score that the King had scattered to harry the land,
And each was to act as each deemed best and carried his life in his hand.
We left the road at the river ford, and we struck through the trackless waste,
And ten leagues off we came to a spring that was shaded and sweet to taste.
We left the spring, and in ten leagues more we came to the castled peak
Where we had been told that a booty lay, which was worth the coming to seek.
The castle had gardens all about, and was builded of chiselled stone,
And the crag that bore it was steep and sheer, and stood in the plain alone.
The walled road wound from the fortress gate to the roots of the mighty hill,

And twenty men might have held the place against all
our force or will.
But we were Alexander's men, and our name was a
terror to all,
And never a man would dare to fight, for what we
attacked must fall.
The lord was old and not overbold, and his vassals
were gray with fear.
And he sent his son to treat for terms as soon as
he saw us near.
And Mathos answered the land was ours, and all of
its souls our slaves,
And if one man of our band was harmed, the vultures
should dig their graves;
But since they had greeted us courteously, we would
spare their homes and lives,
And take their horses and slaves and gold, and leave
their daughters and wives.
They led us into the castle court, and stabled the
horses all,
And each of us kept his sword at hand for aught that
might befall.
We ate, set guards at the gates, and slept, and rose
at the break of day
To search the castle from roof to rock for what we
could carry away.
The frightened women clung round the lord, and
Mathos strode to one,
"I shall have this girl for a journey-mate," he said,
"when our stay is done."
"My daughter she is," the old lord cried, "I have
your pledge, she is free."

And Mathos thrust his long jaw out, and he grunted,
"She pleases me."
Her brother stepped out with a heaving breast,
cheeks white, and an angry frown,
And Mathos lifted his sheathless sword, and hewed
the stripling down.
The old lord struck with his naked fist, and Mathos
fell with a groan,
And we yelled and scattered them right and left,
and they fled as the girl had flown.
And Mathos, spitting teeth and blood, snarled out like
an angry hound,
And three in the flurry there were slain, and the rest
were tightly bound,
But the tall grave girl with the fine-spun hair we
neither held nor found.
Then we set stout poles on the castle wall, with
cross-bars nailed or tied
And the white-haired lord and his shrieking serfs
on them we crucified.
We cast our lots for the women all, and we led them
past in sight
Of the men that writhed on high in a row, and we
found the wine by night.
We revelled high in the castle hall, and whenever
we could hear
A scream from the wind-swept wall without, we
answered it with a cheer.
We slept in a heap as each man fell, and woke when
the sun was high,
And the first who went to the stable called with a
scared and startled cry.

The horses were hamstrung every one, save the four
of the chariot team
The lord had showed us with special pride as the
highest in his esteem,
And when we rushed to the terrace wall, we saw on
the road below
A scythe-wheeled war-car like to those we had terri-
ble cause to know,
And the four bays drew it, and, when we looked, they
had nearly reached the plain,
And there was no chance that our pursuit could near
the girl again,
For we saw with amaze that the driver there was the
girl, and the girl alone,
And she stood on the lurching chariot-bed like a
goddess upon her throne;
She wore a corselet of quilted mail, and she waved an
arm on high
To where the knotted corpses hung against the
morning sky,
She lashed the horses, and whirled afar on the parched
and plantless land,
And at last a mere speck disappeared in the cleft of
two hills of sand.
We slaughtered the women with fire or steel as our
mood was, swift or slow,
And each man packed a burden of spoil, and we made
all haste to go.
It was dusk when we trod the level ground, and we
walked in the velvet glare
Of the orange light that was shed afar from the
blazing castle there.

As we trudged we passed on into the dark, and behind
us died the flame,
We steered by the stars, and just at day to the place
of the spring we came.
The burnt tree-trunks were charred to the earth, and
the spring was choked and gone,
And the soil on it trampled by horses' hoofs, and their
prints were plain in the dawn.
We questioned each other's wandering eyes, and each
man looked around,
There was nothing in sight but the cloudless sky and
the calcined, powdered ground.
The plain was brown and yellow and dun, and the
billowing sand-dunes rolled
Like ocean-waves as far as the sky, and two of them
shone like gold.
Then out from between them rose the sun, a red-gold
shield afar,
And blazoned upon its crimson disk a scythe-wheeled,
four-horsed car.
The girl stood in it erect and dumb, and the sun was
behind her head,
And she lashed the beautiful curvetting bays and
straight at our midst she sped.
The spear-head shone on the chariot-pole a man's
length out before,
And the cruel scythes on the hissing wheels in the
sand-spray flashed and tore,
A score of us hurled our trusty spears, but they missed
her, all the score,
And through the midst of our burdened line her track
was a gully of gore.

She wheeled the car in a narrow curve and straightway
turned it back,
And Mathos, cool, with levelled spear, stood con-
fident in her track,
He aimed at the left-hand leader's throat, but he
missed when it yawed and reared,
And by the pole of the rocking car through the chest
was Mathos speared.
She checked the bays in their fullest course; they
pranced and the pole was free;
And the scythes in her passage had mown us down,
and each wheel slaughtered three.
In our quivers our arrows stuck, our bow-cords slipped,
and we could but fail
Of every shot, for the few that sped glanced harmlessly
from her mail;
The horses' wounds but spurred them on; they flew,
but none bucked or fell,
And she leaned back on the tightened reins and
guided them swift and well.
She turned the team at a spear-shot off, and lashed
them back with a cry,
And every man of us felt in his heart he would be
the next to die.
We had dropped our loads and we dropped our
shields, to all of the winds we fled,
And she at the scattering of us paused in the midst
of the mangled dead,
And when she had seen who ran most swift, on him
was the next death done,
And round us in circles she drove and mowed the
swiftest, one by one.

They had been brave, but the bravest fled like a toothless, beaten cur,
And his heart was water within his breast when he heard the nearing whir
Of the hungry scythes as they gnawed the air, and his scared limbs could not flee,
When he knew that the swish of the hurrying blades would reach him just at the knee.
There was neither crevice nor rock nor tree, no shelter, no place to hide;
She drove at random east and west, and she saw each man, and he died.
I saw no hope and I could not flee, I stood in the midst and gazed:
I saw the last man die and I lived, and my heart with dread was dazed.
Then I bethought me that I had called to Mathos to hold his hand,
When he slew the boy who had spoken no word, and I waited for her command.
She drove the car to me at a walk, it was all one clot of gore,
And she gestured toward the river ford, and I walked as she bade before.
We reached the ford in the early dusk and I knew as though I had heard
The message she meant me to give to the King, although she had uttered no word.
I saw our men on the farther bank, and I waded into the stream,
And heard her pause in the midst of the ford, and turned as though in a dream,

I saw her turn the chariot down at the deepest place
of the ford,
And urge the maddened shying colts where the
rapids leapt and roared;
I saw a satisfied, terrible smile on her drawn dis-
cordant face,
And I saw the horses and car in a heap in the current's
midmost race;
I saw the horses and her go down in the light of the
vanished sun,
And I knew that the raid which Mathos had led was
utterly finished and done.

VERTUMNA.

FROM mountain-ridge to seashore, all the plain
Had not one man as handsome as the King,
Mirandus, who had just begun his reign.

His boyish eyes were full of manhood's spring,
His look was always eager, quick, and glad,
His lips seemed just about to shout or sing.

Men loved him as a frank and royal lad
Ready to hunt or fight with equal joy,
And women loved him for a way he had.

Firm as a man, imperious as a boy,
In every matter he would have his way;
Advice he heard, but seldom would employ.

Ardent and fond, he had no wish to stay
Unmarried, but his spirit chafed with spleen
Against all forms and customs. He would say

Parent or guardian, nurse or go-between,
He would not talk with: he himself should choose
The maiden who would be his wife and Queen.

Nobles and burghers pondered on the news.
Their lovely, well-decked daughters, one by one,
Tried with the prince such wiles as women use.

He liked them all, but fell in love with none,
And still continued seeking for a wife
As eagerly as when he had begun.

Vertumna lived an isolated life,
A prophetess and priestess, set apart
From throngs and traffic, chattering and strife.

A sorceress devoted to her art,
She dwelt beside a solitary shrine;
Duty and lore engrossing all her heart.

Her temple stood upon a rocky spine
That jutted from a mountain-spur, among
Forests of chestnut, beech, and sombre pine.

From near and far came suppliants, some young,
Lovers and warriors, some by problems vexed,
Grave councillors, controlled of face and tongue.

Responses solved the doubts of the perplexed,
The sick or wretched found her skill their aid,
One man she cured and comforted the next.

Wrapped in her lore, proud of the part she played,
Of love or loving she had never thought,
By choice and calling she remained a maid.

One day the King, astray while hunting, sought
Refreshment and direction as he passed.
The sight of him before her temple brought

So swift a change, love stormed her heart so fast,
That all her maiden moods and aims were gone
Like leaves blown seaward by a sudden blast

Dreaming of him, she lay awake till dawn,
Hoping for love, her blushes blazed and burned;
Fearing contempt, she startled like a fawn.

Doubting herself, she dreaded to be spurned;
Of meeting him she thought with keen alarm;
To meet, allure, and win him still she yearned.

Then she remembered her most potent charm,
Learned from the kindly dryads of the wood,
Within her powers, sure and free from harm.

By exercise of sorcery she could
Assume at will, and, while she wished it, wear
Whatever semblance to her whim seemed good.

Stature and shape of features, hue of hair,
Tint of complexion, color of her eyes,
Could make her seem unutterably fair.

And, if she failed at first, she might devise
A new appearance and if that were vain
Vary her subtle, exquisite disguise.

Whatever guise should help her love to gain
His love, her magic spell would make her own,
And such, as if so born, she would remain.

She made herself a woman nobly grown,
Tall, rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed, and yellow-haired,
Like princesses her childish dreams had known.

Her garb and her adornment well prepared.
Throbbing with hopes she did not dare evince,
Screened in her litter, to the town she fared.

Mastering the fears that made her shrink and wince,
Upon some pretext easy to aver,
As temple-ward, she asked to see the prince.

He gave her audience without demur;
Was gracious; listened; granted what she asked,
But never seemed to see or notice her.

Her power of self-control had been so tasked
By her chagrin, that when at home again
And like herself, her woe could not be masked.

Her women, seeing all her soul in pain,
Not knowing why, and scared, did all they might
To soothe and cheer her, not for long in vain.

After a frantic, agonizing night,
She moped some dreadful days and nights away;
Then woke one morning, purposeful and bright.

Again she wove enchantments to array
Her yearning soul in charms of dainty flesh
Such as few women ever can display.

A milk-white skin, miraculous and fresh,
A regal poise, deep hazel eyes aglow,
And burnished, bronzy tresses, mesh on mesh.

In this appearance she took care to go
Into the city when the king would ride
In a procession, dignified and slow.

Borne loftily, her litter open wide,
Among her cushions, she surveyed the throng
Whose admiration filled her heart with pride.

Her waiting for the pageant was not long.
The pomp wound towards the place of sacrifice.
Expecting triumph, all her hopes were strong.

Yet utter failure met her proud device.
The king surveyed her with a steady gaze,
But did not pause or con her beauty twice.

Incredulous, bewildered, in a daze,
She was unconscious of her journey back.
For long she drooped. At length, her hopes ablaze,

Once more her spells prepared for love's attack
Splendors of form and features, eyes like jet,
A dark, warm skin and hair of shining black.

Clothed in such beauty, once again she met
The king, and won no more of his regard
Than previously. Her purpose still more set,

She showed another guise, as evil-starred,
Again and yet again. He took no heed.
His gaze was blank, impersonal, or hard.

Her oracles all promised her good speed,
And, though so often baffled and ignored,
She hoped the mystic seventh would succeed.

So, when from her distress her fancies soared,
She made herself a girl beyond all girls
With all the grace enchantment could afford.

Small features, rose-leaf skin, and teeth like pearls,
Dimples, curved lips like coral in their hue,
Big violet eyes, wide brows, and golden curls.

Riding amid his splendid retinue,
He passed her as she stood beside the road,
As lovely as a rosebud starred with dew.

His dazzled train, all fascinated, glowed
With admiration, but he gave no sign,
As stolid as the horse that he bestrode.

Fearing her gods were false, or turned malign,
Despondent, abject, broken, dazed, and cowed,
She shrank away; abandoned her design,

And, when at home, despairingly allowed
The days to pass in brooding, heeded not
The arts and duties which had made her proud.

Her clients left, ignored or clean forgot;
She wandered in the wilds from glen to glen,
Wide-eyed, but gazing at she knew not what.

So far she kept from all the ways of men
That seldom did a faint, thin, distant horn
Tell her of hunters barely in her ken.

Woe-weary, heavy-hearted, and forlorn,
She sought her safest, favorite retreat
Across rain-freshened hills, one fair, clear morn.

A little brook-side glade was at her feet,
Sun-gilded trees above, a beetling crag
Behind her, hollowed to a throne-like seat.

She heard the brushwood crackle, and a stag,
Too wearied out to run, tottered and crept
Into the glade on limbs he scarce could drag:

His hunted eyes upon her face he kept,
  Crawled to her, laid his head upon her lap,
As if for shelter. Then at last she wept.

  Melted to pity for the beast's mishap,
She felt at last the soothing balm of tears;
  Her bonds of wretchedness all seemed to snap,

The moods and visions of her springtime years
  Revived in her there sobbing, with her face
Beneath his antlers, laid against the deer's.

  When, straightening up, she loosened her embrace
Of the stag's neck, the creature looked around,
  Listened, and flitted from the open space.

She sat alone, a slim girl, simply gowned
  In white wool homespun, her complexion pale
As bloodless flesh the sun and wind have browned.

  Wisps of her lustreless light hair atrail
Escaped their bands by either hollow cheek;
  Her slender neck seemed pitifully frail.

Her small, cleft chin was quivering and weak;
  Her thin, straight lips were colorless and shook;
Her faint gray eyes were dim, resigned, and meek.

  She heard a splash, a footstep by the brook,
And instantly the king came into view
  Alone, and saw her in her sheltered nook.

A qualm of panic burned her through and through,
  She had not time to hide or flee or weave
A spell to make her beautiful anew.

She sat there numb, yet could not but perceive
On the king's face a look that overjoyed
Her heart with hopes she dared not half believe.

Transfigured by a rapture unalloyed,
He neared her with a diffident advance.
"Are you some deity I should avoid,"

He said, "some vision of a waking trance?
Some goddess or some wood-nymph of these hills?
If you are human, by what strange mischance

"Have we not met before? Your presence thrills
My mind with wonder and my heart with flame.
The longings of my soul your face fulfils.

"Are you divine? Unwittingly I came
To sacrilege, yet plead not. Slay me here.
Or are you mortal? Let me know your name."

She answered: "I am human, do not fear.
I am Vertumna, priestess, head, and ward
At the cliff-temple of the fruitful year."

"Strange," he exclaimed; "your looks do not accord
With anything I seem to recollect
Of that Vertumna." She replied: "My lord,

"You saw me fairer far and better decked,
Radiant in robes and jewels, glad and sure.
You passed me without notice or respect."

He said: "Adornments could not but obscure
Yourself, for had it been yourself I saw,
I must have loved you then, beyond all cure.

"But now I see your very self you draw
All that I am to love you, I behold
In you my boyhood's dreams, my manhood's law."

Such was their wooing. Till they both were old
They saw their perfect happiness endure,
Glad of each other, living days of gold.

THE MEASURE OF THE SWORD.

Ita omnes humiliavit ut etiam poeros ad spatas metiri praeciperet et quicunque eandem mensuram excederet capite plecteretur.—CHRONICA SANGALLENSIS.

I

IN his great tent amid his camp
King Charlemagne, with crisped white beard,
Heard angry shouts and then the tramp
Of an excited mob that cheered,
Yelled, "Murder!" bellowed, "Seize him! bring
The wretch!" and "Leave it to the king!"
"Stone the false knight!" and snarled and jeered.

He stilled them, asked them why they made
This outcry, followed them, and found
Near the encampment, in a glade,
Count Fulk of Var upon the ground,
While, with a foot upon his neck,
His youthful slayer held in check
The gnashing crowd that raged around.

Riding among them, Charlemagne
  Repressed the tumult and the cries
Of "Justice," "Judgment," "Foully slain,"
  And others. From about their prize
The slain man's furious retinue,
Aflame for their revenge, withdrew,
  Abashed and quelled beneath his eyes.

The King then bade the youth declare
  What was the vengeance he had sought,
And granted him a chance to swear
  The duel had been fairly fought,
And when his story had been told
The lad stood, confident and bold,
  While the King sat in silent thought.

Amid the tense, uneasy hush,
  The dead man's henchmen breathing hard,
Alert and ready for a rush,
  Leashed by the monarch's stern regard,
The King addressed his mounted peers
And paladins, who, grave in years,
  Sat next him, grizzled, tanned, and scarred,

"My lords, how are we to decide?
  Either this young man's spite and hate
Besmirch the dead, if he have lied,
  With crimes too hideous to relate,
Or, if their truth should be assured,
For the injustice he endured
  No reparation is too great."

Said Ogier: "I believe this youth."
Said Huon of Bordeaux: "We trudged
Campaigns together; 't is the truth."
The Count of Flanders had not budged
Upon his horse. He growled: "I know
That every word he says is so."
Then thus the Emperor adjudged:

"His death in combat at your hands
Was just; his sins be on his head.
His titles, vassals, serfs, and lands
Are yours by right. Let all men dread
To harm you. Now that they have heard,
Let no man contravene my word."
And this is what the youth had said:

II

"King Karl, the measure of the sword
He meted out to me of old
I have here repaid. I have restored
Back into hell the soul he sold.
This carrion beneath my heel
Should have been broken on the wheel
For deeds too monstrous to be told.

"I slew him in a fair, set fight.
I used no vantage to begin:
On any man of greatest might
Among his hirelings or his kin
I am prepared at once to prove
My words, if any dares to move
The test which I am sure to win.

"Yet before any shall advance
As champion, let them all weigh well
My wrongs, and how there is no chance
To overcome me. I shall tell,
That all who listen here may be
Judges between this corpse and me,
Just how between us it befell.

"Only one single time before
Did Fulk and I stand face to face.
I was a child then, yet I swore
To have his life, but not by base
Plots, or by tricks: I did not choose
Such means as he was keen to use,
Which I escaped by Heaven's grace.

" A great lord, mighty in the realm,
With fiefs and castles, should have had
No taxing task to overwhelm
A poor, scarce friended, nameless lad.
Yet at the thought of me he quailed,
And all his treacherous efforts failed.
With Heaven's protection I was clad.

" While I was yet a tiny waif
Chance charity had saved and kept,
My days and nights were never safe
From murderous caitiffs, knaves that crept
About me, or who lay in wait
To poison what I drank or ate,
To stab or brain me as I slept.

" While I was yet a page, unskilled
In combat or the use of arms,
My very neighborhood so filled
His guilty conscience with alarms
That he endeavored to prevent
Encountering me and all it meant
By pagan spells and heathen charms.

" And when I had become a squire,
Though I was dogged, day after day,
By the assassins he could hire,
If near him my lord's forces lay,
He always managed to arrange
For his command some sudden change
That took him some half a world away.

" While I was with the northern host
Searching morasses for the dens
Of forest savages, his post
Was south among the Saracens;
And when my master marched to Spain,
This coward hastened to regain
The naked heaths and fog-wrapped fens.

" Throughout those years, while I was set
On my revenge, and though I knew
That I should kill him if we met,
I was as much resolved to sue,
If chance permitted, at your throne,
Convict him, so regain mine own,
And leave his punishment to you.

"Then came that glorious day whose noise
Yet rings, when, while our elders feared
Or blenched, ten thousand ardent boys
For certain death we volunteered,
With Aimeri to lead us on
To storm impregnable Narbonne,
While all the army prayed and cheered.

"And when our frenzied, hopeless dash,
To our amazement and delight,
All in one swift, bewildering flash
Stormed town and castle, keep and height,
As you were generous to accord
To every lad his due reward,
With others I was made a knight.

"When several of us, by your leave,
For special praise our deeds had gained,
Had been selected to receive
Presents of honor, you had deigned
To grant to me at my request
Whatever weapon pleased me best
Of all your treasury contained.

"And when, in all that countless hoard,
Where mounds of hilts and scabbards shone,
I recognized this self-same sword
As if it had been there alone,
I knew that it was God's plain will
That in my hands this blade should kill
This traitor, now it was my own.

"I told my friends that I should make
No accusation or appeal
And each took oath he would not break
His silence, and would not reveal
My wrongs, till after God's design,
As shown me by this wondrous sign,
Was executed by my steel.

"After your armies ceased to roam,
As all your conquests had been won,
And every man who had a home
Turned homeward, since the wars were done,
Fulk knew that I was on his track
And schemed to weaken the attack
He could not any longer shun.

"So to this place I was decoyed
Alone, that he might here commence
The combat he could not avoid,
And win it by his skill of fence;
Or that his skulking cravens could
Surround me, sneaking from the wood,
While he but stood on his defence.

"But when he recognized this blade
Before him from its scabbard flashed,
His green tusks chattered, and he swayed,
And self-abandoned and abashed,
He tottered, shrouded in the gloom
Of his inevitable doom,
Before our swords had met and clashed.

" Knowing God's anger and his guilt,
The framer of the vilest plot
By which on earth was ever spilt
The blood of innocents, forgot
His craft and signals. The red spout
Of gore that let his vile soul out
Removed our knighthood's foulest blot.

" This is the tale of what he did
And save that I must clear my fame,
It should remain forever hid,
Not only since he soils our name,
But as this fiend was called a man,
His greed and his satanic plan
Must fill all kindly men with shame.

III

" Enthusiastic for the spread
Of our true faith and of your sway,
My father, young and ardent, led
Some hundred men-at-arms away
From Var, where our great castle frowns
On farms and forests, towers and towns,
Of which he would be lord some day.

" Yet he felt called upon to preach
Religion in the very nest
Of heathendom, to plant and teach
Our knightly ways in lands unblest.
His youth and power, his wealth and will
He dedicated to fulfil
What he conceived was God's behest.

"Count Guy demurred he could not spare
From his plain duty to his fief
His eldest son and darling heir.
He urged his need of him, his grief
At his departure: yet his heart
Was all on fire to depart,
Full of his purpose and belief.

"Pleasure and safety he forsook;
Beyond your realm's utmost verge
Far north and east his way he took,
Your herald and the heathen's scourge.
Forests and mountain-chains he passed
Till on the Saxon heaths at last
His force was able to emerge.

"Besides him, many knights espoused
The pious hermit's hope to save
The heathen tribes, and were aroused
To march northeastward in a wave.
But he alone achieved success;
Others limped homeward in distress
Or found in savage wilds their grave.

"He built a castle on a hill,
And after months of hard-fought strife
Subdued the chiefs he did not kill;
Won to our faith and way of life
The kinglet nearest to the place,
With all his family and race,
And took his daughter for his wife.

" She bore him seven goodly boys,
And me the eighth. He loved his lot,
Its power, honor, wealth, and joys,
But could not pierce or rend the knot
Of foes about him; could not stir
Towards home, or send a messenger;
And so lived utterly forgot.

" Meanwhile, Count Fulk had qualified,
With full observance, to succeed,
After Count Guy of Var had died,
To all his fiefs, and, though his greed
Showed later, this then was no crime,
Since he and all men at that time
Believed he was the heir indeed.

" And then at last your patience turned
To ire, since Saxony disgraced
The world with heathen rites, and spurned
The faith all other men embraced,
And you made ready to despatch
A mighty host, to overmatch
Their tribes and leave their land a waste.

" The heathen so aroused your wrath
You gave commands to execute
All captured males along their path,
To accept no convert or recruit,
Beheading mercilessly both
The men and boys of manly growth;
And, that there should be no dispute

" Who should be slain and who be spared,
You gave a sword-blade as a guide,
By which, point down, hilt up, and bared,
All doubtful cases should be tried,
And those whose heads should come below
The cross-guard, set and measured so,
Should be preserved, and none beside.

" The very sword which you bestowed,
To which you bade your men align
Their prisoners along their road
Has now, by heaven's plain design,
Become my weapon, by your gift.
Before your eyes you see me lift
This red avenger, which is mine.

IV

" It pleased your council to select
That Ganelon for chief command,
Who then had all the world's respect,
And with him went, as his right hand,
Count Fulk of Var, my uncle, then
One of the Empire's richest men
And leader of a mighty band.

" They poured through Saxony, a flood,
An inundation swift and vast,
Drowning the land in fire and blood,
And leaving nothing where they passed;
They came to where my father dwelt
And he exulted, for he felt
That his reward was near at last.

" As if for pastime or to hunt,
Without a helmet and unarmed,
To meet their close-ranked serried front
My father cantered, unalarmed,
Not dreaming that their grim approach
Could, even by mischance, encroach
On his domains, or he be harmed.

" Scattered behind, light-horsed and few,
Without a breast-plate, bow, or spear,
His easy-going retinue
Followed without a thought of fear,
And when they saw their master swing
His cap, and heard him shout and sing,
They waved their caps and gave a cheer.

" He saw the archers in the van;
He saw Var's haughty banner float
Above them—little ripples ran
Across it. Then on every coat—
He did not need to scan it twice—
He saw displayed his own device;
Var's house-call carolled from his throat.

" My father bade his men rejoice.
Count Fulk of Var, upon the flank
Of his battalion, knew the voice,
The call; his crumbling heart-strings shrank.
That instant, as he recognized
His brother's face, he realized
His loss of power, wealth, and rank.

" He did not hesitate or pause:
Quick as a lightning-flash he chose
To give himself to Satan's claws.
He yelled out: 'Ambush! These are foes.
Volley!' and, as the order rang,
A thousand bow-strings gave one twang;
A cloud of arrows, hurtling, rose.

" My father fell. Without remorse
His fiendish-minded brother rushed
Upon the corpse his prancing horse
Until the upturned face was crushed.
From off his breast the archers tore
The emblazoned surcoat that he wore
And thus the plainest proofs were hushed.

" Some of my father's men survived,
All wounded, all in tears and crazed
From panic; and with these arrived—
While all the castle force was dazed—
A wash of wolfish men, that put
The helpless gate-guard under foot,
Before the drawbridge could be raised.

" The sun was blurred, behind the smoke
Of villages and farms transformed
To embers. All the doors they broke.
At the first rush the keep they stormed.
My mother with her sons was found,
And all of us were seized and bound.
About us jeering swordsmen swarmed.

" My mother, dignified and tall,
Amid their taunting, blood-stained glee,
Kept up her courage through it all,
Still confident, if she could see
And talk with any knight or lord,
He would to us at once accord
Protection, and would set us free.

" Then she beheld this mighty count,
The blackest-hearted wretch on earth,
Enter the courtyard, and dismount.
She told our lineage and birth.
He saw, if she should win belief,
By truthfulness and touching grief,
How much his titles would be worth.

" So, when this fair pathetic wraith
Declared us Franks and nobly born,
Baptized and of the holy faith,
By misadventure made forlorn,
Since he was with the lords to flout
Her pleading words, and raise a shout
Of 'Pretext,' she was met with scorn.

" Famished and thirsty, galled with chains,
We passed, inside a crowded sty,
A night of miseries and pains.
Then we were led, we knew not why,
Down to the castle's tilting-field,
And there we watched and saw revealed
The doom that we were threatened by.

"I saw the stern commander stand
Where round a slab the grass was mown,
This very sword-hilt in his hand.
He set the point upon the stone.
Then from his mother's arms, fast-clenched
About her child, a boy was wrenched,
And stood beside the blade alone.

"I saw Lord Fulk, with others, lean;
I saw the four bluff swordsmen bend
To eye the space that came between
His ringlets and the cross-guard's end.
And, when again his mother clasped
Her boy, she laughed and sobbed and gasped,
And why I did not comprehend.

"One after one the children filed
Up to the sword and were let pass.
And then a somewhat taller child
Reached to the inwrought steel and brass.
I saw the burly swordsmen seize
The lad, and force him to his knees.
His head rolled severed on the grass.

"A score, a hundred lads were held
Beside the sword, and all were served
Alike. The swordsmen toiled and yelled,
The red blades flashed, and never swerved.
The corpses lay about pell-mell.
The heads were kicked from where they fell.
Only the babies were preserved.

"I staggered at my mother's knee,
Too weak, too innocent, and young,
For what I had been forced to see.
I smelt, and tasted on my tongue,
The steam of blood. I saw the spouts
Of gore along the swords in gouts;
The noise of shrieks about us hung.

"But when towards us the butchers moved,
The Count of Flanders interposed:
'This woman's tale is not disproved,
Its verity may be disclosed.'
He said: 'I hold that we should wait
Until we can investigate.
The truth cannot be changed or glozed.'

"But Fulk of Var then raised a cry,
With furious rage and evil zest,
That every one of us should die;
We were not worthy of the test.
But Ganelon stood fast and scowled;
Ignored them both, and only growled:
'Let them measured be with the rest.'

"Seeing the men-at-arms advance,
My brother whispered in my ear:
'Be brave. You have at least a chance.
Cling to your life, keep up your cheer.
Avenge us. After you have hurled
This hound to earth, tell all the world
His crimes, that all mankind may hear.'

" He topped the great sword, hilt and all,
And knelt himself, not faint or weak.
Our helpless mother saw him fall.
As if she called on God to wreak
His vengeance on this heartless wretch,
The very heaven seemed to stretch
Before the frenzy of her shriek.

" But though so terribly she screamed
At each inexorable stroke,
She looked at first as though she dreamed.
Then suddenly her mind awoke
To her unutterable loss.
She fell, stretched out as on a cross,
And never moved again or spoke.

" Then, of all earthly hope bereft,
Cold, dizzy, shuddering, and blind
With terror, I alone was left.
A strong voice bade the men unbind
My hands, and from behind my head
The youthful Count of Flanders said,
His voice encouraging and kind:

" ' My child, endeavor to be strong.
Go like a knight, since go you must.
Even the worst will not be long.
I shall make sure the test is just.
And this much comfort I can give,
I shall protect you if you live.
You have one friend whom you can trust.'

"Though at his words I felt resolved,
Yet when Count Fulk, my uncle, leaned
To watch me, all my brain revolved.
Above the harvest he had gleaned,
Upon me such a gaze he fixed,
Where eagerness and relish mixed
As on the visage of a fiend.

"They thrust me forward then to death,
Tense, numb with horror and despair,
I stood, I faced him. In one breath
I saw his gloating, wolfish glare
Change into doubt, saw dazed surprise,
Chagrin, and panic in his eyes—
And felt this guard just graze my hair."

DONE FOR.

THE taste of failure I had never known,
Success had claimed and marked me for its own,
Boy-feats more than I could recall or tell
I learnt at once and executed well.
I had been liked by all both young and old,
And grew up healthy, natural, and bold.
Then, with my spurs, I won myself a name,
And in a year or two no narrow fame.
All eyes were turned to me in field or town
From pure good-will not less than my renown.
I found a welcome from light-hearted blades,
And had soft looks and words from wives and maids.
Nothing I did came slowly or came hard;
None showed for me dislike or disregard;
Court-life and war and tourney-field and rest,
I liked them all, and knew not which was best.
Then I met her, and all my life was changed.
At court, although my answered eyes had ranged
Along the ladies' seats, and met bright smiles,
Her look was fixed as though she gazed for miles
Beyond my shoulders, and beheld, past me,
Some sight she would be pleasured not to see.
The fierce delight of battle paled and dimmed.
What profit now to meet some mighty limbed,

Loud-named helm-hewer, and leave him stretched and stark;
I knew that when she heard she would not mark,
But would sit with her courteous calm grace,
Without expression in her pose or face.
And in a joust or tourney, if some stroke
Or some dexterity of mine awoke
From benches and from dais round on round
Of warm applause, when at the welcome sound
I caught a free breath in the weapon-play,
And cast a single longing glance her way,
My heart would stop and my lungs burst with rage
To see her chatting with some dapper page,
Plying her lace fan evenly and slow,
Not even watching wounds and death below.
Yet I still hoped my prowess or blind chance
Might win her love or make some slight advance.
Though she was always chilly, curt, and rude,
Despair I would not, since I had not sued.
And, while in doubt, the dream might still be nursed
That the last outcome would not be the worst.
Then came the crisis in my kin's affairs;
Freshets of hopes alternate with despairs;
Hindrances to our wealth, shocks to our fame—
Gusts of reports surcharged with loss and shame,
Vague rumors, open mutterings, later yet
Plain charges, challenge made and challenge met.
And I was chosen by our clan and side
Chief champion, and accepted in glad pride.
Up to this time, though I had yearned in vain,
And being near her had but brought me pain,

All her rebuffs and cumulative scorns
Had spurred me on like flagellating thorns.
To brood upon how all my plans befell
Was irritant but stimulant as well;
Looking ahead, I knew she might reject
My suit outright, but I did not suspect
Despondence or dejection's grip might seize
My coiled volitions, come what chance might please.
The more insuperable the prospect seemed,
The more my sinews strung, my tense brain schemed
To conquer chances, to subdue her hate,
To win her love and person soon or late.
And now I felt keen joy that I could trust
My eye and hand to win this much discussed
Wager of battle. Dearly I loved strife—
Man set to man for honor or for life.
Here both were risked; much honor was to win,
Wealth, power, reputation for my kin;
Leadership with them while my prime endured
And chieftaincy in age would be secured,
And all these hung upon my sword and spear,
And so seemed easily in reach and near.
And, such is love's fatuity, I weened
That, if, victorious and well-demeaned,
I came out from this joust, I had some chance,
If at the nick I made a bold advance,
To win consent from her, or at the least
Some sign of yielding; and my hopes increased.
For till the judgment ends all hopes and fears,
Through dreads and doubts, through centuries and years,

Lovers will plan, by service or by deed—
Such as would gain a well-disposed maid's heed,
For one who plead transfigured, flushed, and scarred—
To win from unrelenting dames regard.
By the preceding day I had well planned
Our strategy, and had advised my band.
Nothing remained till dawn to do or say;
Hale, shrived, and houselled on my bed I lay.
There came to me returning thoughts of her,
Forgotten partly in our warlike stir.
I rose, and in the sidelong moonlight there
Kneeled on the rushes, and in brief hot prayer
Besought our Lady and the saints to give
A sign, not that I should prevail and live—
Of both these I felt certain—but if aught
That I could do would touch her heart or thought.
When afterward I laid me down and slept,
Into my ken a vague, dim vision crept.
It seemed that I was smaller than I am.
My lids drooped heavily; my hot eyes swam;
My breathing made no sound, my tongue was dumb;
I could not move my limbs, I was all numb,
With a strange sense of helplessness and fright
Like a girl-child lost and alone at night.
I felt as I imagined one might feel
Trampled by hoofs, battered and pierced by steel,
Who all night in the wind and frost has lain,
Crushed yet alive under a heap of slain.
I lay cramped, crumpled, weaponless within
The circling arms of some one of my kin
Who bore me, not as one would strain below
Some great-boned warrior, pantingly and slow,

But as one bears a weightless infant, caught
Against his breast, without remark or thought.
I seemed borne down with an enormous weight
And struggling to remember, now too late,
Things best forgotten, as though I had passed
Through some misfortune limitlessly vast.
Nothing was clear in this strange dream except
The hateful, certain consciousness—that kept,
I knew not how, coiled round me like a snake,
Like nothing I had ever known awake—
That I was broken, crippled, spoiled, and maimed,
My body ruined, yet my soul unshamed.
Then like a torch-flash through my dreaming flared
The half thought that I had essayed and dared
Some needless danger for my lady; fought
Against vast odds; had acted as I ought,
And had been conquered by some chance malign,
Wrecked and disfeatured by no fault of mine
But in her service, and my heart ebbed out
At the unconquerable pressing doubt,
Would she still spurn me as when her fit mate,
Or pity somewhat now my wretched state.
All this passed in a breath; my bearer strode
With his unnoticed, barely sentient load,
Down a long cloistered corridor-like way,
Pillared at intervals, as light as day,
With a clerestory pierced with windows square,
Opened unlatticed to the outer air,
And set above my head some feet, as though
A walk was there whence one might gaze below.
And moving as we moved through them we saw
My lady's face, pure, fair, without a flaw,

Gazing straight forward, quiet and unvexed,
From each space reappearing in the next,
As if she paced for pastime in her pride,
And knew or heeded not my pain outside.
My bearer turned, some steps he reached and climbed,
And there, as if our movements had been timed,
At a door, arras-hung, framed in carved wood,
Upon my left my lovely lady stood,
Her hand upon the hangings, on her head
A circlet of cut jewels flaming red,
Her curled lips redder, her cheeks pale and cool,
Her eyes deep-colored like a woodland pool,
Her garments flowing, graceful fold on fold,
But all her seeming not more fair than cold.
And when she saw me perfectly and clear,
She laughed out with a ringing, merry sneer.
My heart shut at the sound; my dreaming broke;
In a cold agony of dread I woke,
And in the young light of the growing morn
I lay, eyes shut, heart quaking and forlorn.
Unthinking and by folly too deceived,
In my fierce panic then I quite believed
This was the sign for which I just had prayed,
And, so believing, was the more afraid;
But now for years I have known in my heart
That it was sorcery or wicked art.
Witchcraft I had discredited, and charms;
Magic to me had never caused alarms;
But now I felt its might; without a spell,
No change could come such as to me befell.
All of the current of my nature's stream
Was altered by that momentary dream.

Victor in all my fights, strong to prevail,
I felt my hams cringe and my courage quail,
My pride snuffed out, and my ambition bowed
As if I were a laggard, quelled and cowed
By the remembrance of recalls, retreats,
Disasters, blunders, sneakings, and defeats.
That transient vision made my force as lame
As a long past of cowardice and shame.
The thought of wounds had been as strange to me
As a real wound or overthrow could be,
And now anticipations crammed my head
Of agony and terror, pain and dread.
My very arms brought fright to me, not pride,
My impulse was to crawl away and hide.
I bungled our formation; lost my head;
Misplaced the watch-words; fought with arms like lead;
Went down before a boy opponent's spear,
And all beholders said I blenched for fear.
We lost the gage, I was not killed outright,
Though I had many wounds; and in the night
My kin conveyed my senseless carcase off,
And hid me well from injury or scoff.
When cured and whole, my life was done, and I
Fled here; took orders; and here wait to die.

MARCABRUN.

A la fontana del vergier,
On l' erb es vertz jostal gravier.
MARCABRUN.

I found her by the fountain where
The castle garden slopes aside.
The spring birds' songs lit all the air,
And that slim brook the grasses hide
Droned in the shadows; many flowers
Made all the borders glad and fair.
After so many lonely hours
I saw her kneeling there.

Through endless leagues of angry sea
And wet gray skies we won the shore
At dawn; the sunrise seemed to be
A dawn in heaven, with the roar
Still in our ears of strange, wild waters,
With hands outworn by sword and oar,
Weary of watchings and of slaughters
We wandered now no more.

With the soft air I loved so well
Fresh in my nostrils, still it seemed
Too sweet to be; I could not tell
Whether I lived or if I dreamed

To wake with Moslem war-cries ringing
Around our starved camp, yell on yell,
In the hot, desert twilight, singing
The songs of fiends of hell.

Across the orchard's gentle slope
She did not look as I drew near,
As in my voice there was no hope.
Speaking her name, she did not hear;
Then I perceived that she was praying.
I stood irresolute, for fear
Lest I might hear if she were saying
Words only for God's ear.

"Dear God, it was at your behest,"
She said, and tears were in her voice,
"That brave King Louis with his best
Took the one love that was my choice
On his crusade to strive and battle
For your son's tomb, a dreadful quest.
Each night I hear his hoarse death-rattle
In dreams of wild unrest.

"Alas, two long years have gone past
Since I saw him, nor have I heard.
Was my last sight of him the last
In very deed? My eyes are blurred
With tears. I pray to keep him living,
Dear Lord, each day; my dreams are stirred
Still with no message of your giving
No comfort, not one word.

"Dear God, his love would have been mine,
Had he not gone into the East;
The voice that called him was divine,
Oh, let it answer me, at least.
Give me some hope, give me some token
He is alive across the brine.
If no assurance may be spoken
Give me at least some sign."

My heart within my bosom sank,
Turned all at once from flame to lead;
The blood in all my body shrank,
The heavens boomed above my head;
The earth beneath my feet seemed sinking;
My doom in blazing words outspread,
Seemed written on the sky, and blinking,
And gasping, thus I said:

"My lady, all your fears are vain.
Charles of Loupey is living now;
As we cast anchor, with his train
I saw him at his galley's prow.
His name is crowned with all men's praises;
His sword has mown his foes like grain;
Blest with high honor, such as raises
Few, he comes home again."

My darling started, and her face,
As if she suddenly awoke,
Changed, but she moved not from her place
Till I had ceased; a soft smile broke

Forth in her eyes, like opening flowers,
Through me it sent a lightning stroke;
Her tears fell gently, like spring showers;
Then she stood up and spoke.

No other face so fair might be,
No angel's voice could tell her charms.
"I will chide God no more," said she,
And opened out to me her arms,
"God is good, he has made me know it,
Since him I prayed so long to see
My own true love, my loyal poet,
God has brought back to me."

CERTAINTY.

THE huge rough Duke, all ruddy and fresh-tanned
With the last war, lolled in the winter sun
Upon his bear-skins and rich furs in piles.
Southward the day was perfect on the land,
Crisp zephyrs all around the castle spun,
The sky seemed made of smiles.

The slim fair King, close-knit and nervous-thewed,
Sat by him on the terrace, in his chair,
His sword beneath his lute across his knees.
His eyes saw more of everything he viewed,
Although he quaffed less deeply of the air;
Felt less the bracing breeze.

"A poet do you call this pensioner?"
Scoffed the big Duke, a laugh deep in his beard,
"Poet, and therefore pensioner of yours!
If he be so, his songs make little stir.
Who sings them? Is he loved for them or feared
Among your troubadours?"

"Nay," quoth the King, "a pensioner he is,
Being my loyal subject from the first.
A poet is he, perfect in his art.
If you have never known a song as his,
Believe me when I say his very worst
Have moved my inmost heart."

"Give me a sign of each," still urged the Duke,
"His utter loyalty for no rewards;
His poet's soul, one not to be denied."
And the King knit his brows, half in rebuke,
Half at his memories of rebel lords,
And slowly he replied:

"He was the first I spoke to when my wrong
Was at its greatest. And he took my side—
A ragged wanderer, altered and alone—
And he it was who made the battle-song
We sang, when in my traitor uncle's pride
We hurled him from the throne.

"And, when I asked him how he knew his King,
He answered as a poet only might,
His quick eyes lit with an undoubted gleam:
'I knew you without proof of anything.
I felt conviction in me at first sight,
As vivid as a dream.' "

THE EMPEROR.

TOWARD evening of a perfect afternoon,
The morrow of a gorgeous festival,
An emperor was pacing by the sea.
Like sluggish wreaths of lapsing incense-smoke
Dissolving down a stilled, deserted aisle
There eddied in the cloisters of his soul
Subsiding reminiscences of pomp,
Emotions, adulation, and resolves.
Save for his youngest son, a child at play,
Between the pines and waves he stood alone.
The round, red sun above the sailless sea
Glowed like a lamp before a solemn shrine;
The firmament was quiet as a dome
Above the hush of a cathedral nave;
The monarch felt the fountains of his heart
Well up within, and overflow with prayer.
His mind traversed his tense, terrific past;
Saw the triumphant present he had won;
Beheld the splendid prospect far before,
And yearned above the fabric he had made.
"O God," he cried, "my guardian and my hope,
Look down upon the work that I have wrought,
A broad-based empire, founded full and firm,
Built for thy glory in the fear of thee,
Bastioned about the provinces in tiers,
And dominated by a dynasty

Far-rooted, virile, fashioned to endure.
Bless it and have it in thy holy keep,
And look upon it still benignantly
Through endless generations yet to be."

God heard him from his high and awful throne
Beside the ocean of eternity.
He eyed the countless ripples of the years
Wrinkling the shifting and unresting slopes;
The huddled wavelets of the centuries
That seamed the periods along their flanks;
The serried billows of the ages, ridged
And huge in their implacable advance,
Innumerable to their vanishing
Against the infinite horizon's verge.
He felt the unrelenting wind of fate,
Unveering, sempiternal, and the same,
Push on, undeviating and serene,
Propelling all before it and below.
Afar across its booming resonance
He heard heave and subside in mighty breaths
The respiration of the tides of time
Undreaming in their multitudinous sleep.
The whisper of the cycles as they waked
Diffused a drone throughout the firmament.
He heard void hollows of resurgent time
Obscurely moaning from their darkened depths
Between the threatening and majestic dunes
Of bulged, recurrent æons weltering on.
Amid the tumult, he descried the noise
Of overdriven eras toppling down,
Smashing and sliding into ravening spray;

The culminating crash and rending roar
From the disdainful and tumultuous crests
Of maddened epochs bursting into foam.
The present, poised and arching in its leap,
Crumbled in long battalions, writhed and frayed,
Of hissing, live, and ever-climbing surf
That flogged the altering, unsubstantial shore.
Watching its lapping tongues of swishing spume,
God looked upon the Emperor and smiled.

The eager child embraced his father's knees,
And shouted: "Father, look what I have made!
I made it all myself and all for you.
Let us come here and see it every day."

The Emperor regarded walls and forts,
Redans and scarps heaped up of oozing sand.
The rising wind sang strongly toward the coast;
A lathering gush of effervescing froth
Licked toward his feet; and he looked down and smiled.

THE GHOULA.

BECAUSE my mate did not return,
And since my little ones must eat,
I sallied forth alone to learn,
Myself, to win my children meat.

Whatever man upon my way,
Hunter or villager robust,
I met alone and marked for prey,
My smile would lull his first distrust;

My beauty touched his heart at length,
And in my form he could not guess
A hint of that titanic strength
Which even female ghouls possess.

At dusk, at sundawn, or at noon
I lured him from ravine or road
To where the ruins are. And soon
We feasted in our dim abode.

Men's flesh is best. If none came near,
I caught some bullock, sheep, or goat,
Or, waiting at a pool the deer,
Leapt like a panther at its throat.

Three days, and to my younglings' cries
I brought but pilfered scraps of food.
I saw the famine in their eyes
And hunted in no gentle mood.

Next day above the desert plain
Our Persian sky arched blue and clear.
From the lookout where I had lain
I saw a figure drawing near;

An Englishman who strayed alone,
Careless of nomads, ghouls, or spells,
To beat the waste of sand and stone
For hares or bustards or gazelles.

He spoke our homely Persian tongue;
I found him nowise hard to fool;
And yet, he was so tall and young,
I wished that he had been a ghoul.

My hunting had engrossed my mind,
Since of my mate I was bereft.
Now, staring through the months behind,
I felt how lonely I was left.

My starved mouth watered at the view
Of pink cheeks, tender, plump, and nigh,
And yet it seemed a pity too;
He looked too comely far to die.

As by my side he idly paced,
Before the ruins we had neared,
Between two boulders on the waste,
Some distance off, a doe appeared.

He raised his rifle and took aim.
  Then, as I watched to see her spring,
He stopped and said: "It seems a shame
  "To kill the pretty, dainty thing."

It startled me to find this youth,
  So heedless, hale, and lithe of limb,
Felt for his game the selfsame ruth
  Which I had felt at sight of him.

She stood and stared before she ran.
  "What good to us that she should roam,"
I said: "Best shoot her while you can,
  We have no meat at all at home."

His bullet missed. The creature fled.
  He flushed, surprised, chagrined, and vexed.
Then, smiling cheerily, he said:
  "I may do better with the next.

"That lean doe was not worth regret,
  You may get meat some other way."
I answered, with my purpose set,
  "Indeed, I rather think I may."

. . . . . .

How cool the shadowed archway smelt,
  Pleasant and softly lit inside!
His arm went round my waist. I felt
  My young would not have long to bide.

They cowered huddling in our lair.
  Their pangs I knew they would endure
In silence, rather than to scare
  Quarry of which I was not sure.

Inebriated with my charms,
  He held me closely, unaware
That he was helpless in my arms
  As is a rabbit in a snare.

Time after time our lips had met;
  His curly head to mine I drew,
A kiss upon his throat I set—
  And bit the windpipe through and through.

. . . . . .

Firm flesh to eat, clean blood to drink,
  Fitted to make my dear ones thrive,
And yet, since then, I often think—
  He was so handsome when alive.

Who knows, but for my darlings' need
  I might have softened, let him go?
I find it in my heart indeed
  To wish that he had shot the doe.

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